

READER

The Reader's guide to the
**CHICAGO
BLUES
FESTIVAL**

The fest diversifies its lineup for its third year in Millennium Park, with south-side dynamo **Melody Angel**, suave and sexy R&B star Latimore, genre-defying singer Bettye LaVette, and many more.

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THIS WEEK ON CHICAGOREADER.COM



Should a CBD user be worried about drug tests at work?

Our expert says it depends.



Movie Tuesday: Five cheers for Raúl Ruiz

Ben Sachs on films that show the prolific Chilean-born filmmaker at his best



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Correction: Corinne Halbert's name was misspelled in the Books and Comics Issue story "Four slices of CAKE."

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TRANSPORTATION

Time for a sustainable revolution

Chicago's new wave of aldermen discuss transportation goals.

By **JOHN GREENFIELD**

These are heady times in Chicago. We recently inaugurated Lori Lightfoot as our first black, female, and openly gay mayor, and she immediately signed an executive order to end aldermanic privilege. That dubious tradition has allowed City Council members to veto good projects within their wards, including sustainable transportation initiatives.

With the latest round of federal indictments against once-powerful 14th Ward boss Ed Burke—the council's last remaining member of the Vrdolyak 29, the bloc of mostly white aldermen who fought the racially charged Council Wars against Mayor Harold Washington—Burke appears to be on his way out of City Hall and on to prison.

And 12 new aldermen joined the council last month, including five open Democratic Socialists, joining incumbent 35th Ward rep and Democratic Socialists of America member Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, which means that a full 12 percent of the 50 council seats are now held by DSA-endorsed politicians. There's a spirit of change in the air.

As such, this would be a great time for a sustainable transportation revolution in Chicago. Lightfoot's transportation platform and statements suggest that she's on the right page on these issues. She's committed to budgeting \$20 million a year for walking and biking, promised to implement several strategies to speed up buses, proposed sensible ride-hailing regulations, and indicated that she will kill Rahm Emanuel and Elon Musk's O'Hare Express vaporware boondoggle.

To get a better sense of what other improvements for walking, biking, and transit are in store, I reached out to the dozen freshman aldermen to ask about their transportation priorities, and several got back to me by press time. Here's what's on their to-do lists.

Daniel La Spata, First Ward

Before incumbent alderman Proco Joe Moreno

was charged with filing a false stolen vehicle report and insurance fraud last month, he had a reputation for pushing the envelope on transportation, advocating for dockless bike-sharing, Car2go point-to-point car-share, and dockless electric scooters. La Spata, a Democratic Socialist who says he makes 95 percent of his trips on foot, bike, or transit, promises to continue promoting outside-the-box transportation solutions in the near-northwest-side ward, but hopefully without the shady personal dealings.

High on La Spata's list of goals is improving the district's miserable "D" rating for bus service in the Active Transportation Alliance's recent Bus Friendly Streets Report Cards study. In particular, he wants to boost speeds on the popular but sluggish #66 Chicago Avenue route.

La Spata said he's looking forward to the Chicago Department of Transportation's upcoming protected bike lane project on Milwaukee Avenue (nicknamed the Hipster Highway for its heavy bicycle traffic) between Sacramento and Western in Logan Square.

He's also excited about Active Trans' proposal to create a safer bike and pedestrian route between Logan and Lathrop Homes through improvements to Logan Boulevard and Diversey. "As a cyclist, [transitioning between] Diversey and Logan can be pretty treacherous, so I would love to see something really strong happen there," he told me.

Felix Cardona Jr., 31st Ward

This pro-union candidate, a former staffer for controversial ex-Cook County assessor Joseph Berrios, defeated incumbent Milly Santiago. She was famous for defending her right as "a poor alderman" to receive free Cubs tickets.

Cardona said he's hopeful that recent shared-mobility technology can help fill in the gaps in the transportation network for residents of his northwest-side district, which has no direct CTA el access. "The 31st Ward is in



Alderman Daniel La Spata with First Ward staffer Allison Carvalho. COURTESY OF FIRST WARD

desperate need of sustainable transportation, and that is why my administration, in conjunction with CDOT, is working to bring [Car2go] and Divvy stations to our neighborhoods." He also noted that the ward will be included in this summer's dockless scooter pilot. "I'm excited to be introducing these initiatives and more to our residents who need more transit options."

Samantha Nugent, 39th Ward

This former employee of ex-Illinois attorney general Lisa Madigan won the far-north-side seat vacated by incumbent Margaret Laurino, the architect of Chicago's common-sense ordinance against using a cell phone when biking.

In addition to improving CTA and Metra service in the ward, Nugent said she's jazzed to be working with CDOT to fill in the roughly 1.5-mile gap between the North Branch Trail and the North Shore Channel Trail. "Connecting the trails along the two forks of the river and integrating existing paths near Gompers Park and Eugene Field Park will create a new transportation opportunity for cyclists and pedestrians," she said.

In the long term, Nugent hopes to help link up the North Branch Trail with the existing Sauganash/Valley Line Trail and Lincolnwood's Union Pacific Recreation Path, aka the Weber Spur Trail.

Andre Vasquez, 40th Ward

It was a sign of the times when Vasquez, a Democratic Socialist and former battle rapper,

defeated 36-year incumbent and Vrdolyak 29 member Patrick O'Connor, a symbol of the old Chicago machine. One of the alderman's top priorities is encouraging transit-oriented development (TOD) around the recently funded Edgewater Metra station, slated for Peterson and Ravenswood Avenues, according to ward policy director Geoffrey Cabbage.

But after witnessing the high-end TOD boom along Milwaukee Avenue, which has been blamed for accelerating the displacement of longtime Logan Square residents, "We want to maintain affordability and make sure that residents and businesses that have been in the community for years are able to remain in the neighborhood," Cabbage said.

Vasquez will also be overseeing CDOT's plan to improve Lawrence Avenue from Western to the Chicago River—which includes wider sidewalks and upgraded bike lanes—scheduled for construction next year.

Matt Martin, 47th Ward

In the contest to replace outgoing alderman Ameya Pawar, civil rights lawyer Martin faced off against Emanuel ally Michael Negron. (That meant that when you added an "i" to the end of either candidate's surname, you got the name of a classic gin cocktail.)

Pawar pioneered the city's first "neighborhood greenway" on Berteau Avenue, and Martin said he wants to build more of these traffic-calmed side-street bike routes, as well as protected bike lanes on business streets.

On a macro scale, Martin said, "Chicago needs to step up its game and roll out many more miles of dedicated bus lanes." While he said he'd be happy to get bus lanes on Western in his relatively affluent ward, "we would support prioritizing such lanes to improve connectivity and access to downtown jobs and economic opportunities for our city's most marginalized communities first."

Likewise, while Martin supports bringing more TOD to the area, he wants it to be affordable rather than upscale. "Because transportation has become a commodity marketed to wealthier residents in this city, we must ensure, through zoning stewardship in our own ward as well as through citywide policies, that Chicago's most marginalized residents are the first to benefit from expanded access to transportation."

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NEWS & POLITICS



Ed Burke with his constituents EDWARDBURKE2019.COM

POLITICS

Defending the indefensible

I don't blame Ed Burke for asking: What's in it for me?

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

Having finally gotten around to reading the 59-page federal indictment of Alderman Ed Burke, I feel compelled to say a word or two in his defense. No easy task, I assure you.

Of all the slimy characters I've watched rise from the ooze of Chicago politics over the years, Burke may be the most reptilian.

I don't think I'll ever forgive him for helping lead the Council Wars, a Trump-before-Trump white supremacist aldermanic uprising against Mayor Harold Washington back in the 80s.

However, I must concede that in his own foul and greedy way, Burke asks a pertinent question about Chicago's tax increment financing program: "What's in it for me?"

It's a question, folks, I've been posing for years. Let me explain . . .

As you know, a TIF is, in effect, a surcharge the city adds to your property tax to feed a slush fund that's largely controlled by the mayor.

Hence, Mayor Rahm just threw away about

\$2.4 billion of your property taxes on the Lincoln Yards and 78 TIF deals.

As the long-standing head of the council's Finance Committee, Burke was in a position to do what most Chicago citizens can only dream about—get something from a TIF deal.

And that brings us to the federal indictment.

A New York developer, 601W Companies, wanted an \$18 million TIF handout to help subsidize its redevelopment of the massive Old Main Post Office in the South Loop.

Not sure why they needed all that money. Of course, TIF recipients are rarely, if ever, required to justify the handouts, as Chicago inspector general Joe Ferguson pointed out in his recent report on the TIF scam.

My guess is most developers take the money because our mayors—Rahm and Daley—have been so thirsty to give it to them.

In the case of the Old Main Post Office, the developers from 601W were also seeking a multimillion-dollar property tax break from Cook County. So, they'd pay less in taxes and receive a TIF handout. ➔

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Don't tell me Chicago has a Second City grudge against New Yorkers.

Apparently, Chicago's largesse really irked Burke. Not because we were throwing away tax dollars that we need for our schools, cops, and firefighters. Clearly, he doesn't care about that.

No, Burke was feeling slighted because he wasn't getting his slice of this deal.

We know this because Burke's conversations were being secretly recorded by former 25th Ward alderman Danny Solis, who was wearing a wire for the feds.

As early as August 2016, Burke told Solis he wasn't going to approve the post office deal unless 601W hired his law firm to handle its property tax appeals.

Burke promised to cut Solis in on some of the goodies should 601W retain his law firm by paying him as a "marketing representative." "I'm a believer in sharing the wealth," Burke told Solis, according to the indictment.

Over the next few months, Solis taped several conversations in which Burke belched about not getting business from 601W, cracking lines that will go down in the annals of Chicago quotes. Like . . .

"The cash register has not rung yet."

And "Did we land the, uh, tuna?"

And "Oh, good. Good, good, good. I like Asian."

My bad—that's Solis, the former chair of the council's Zoning Committee, in another FBI recording, explaining how he was willing to swap approval of zoning deals for rub-downs at a massage parlor.

Oh, our aldermen, Chicago.

On October 17, 2017, Burke, Solis, and representatives of 601W met in Solis's office as the developers explained why they needed TIF money for the post office deal.

After the developers left, Burke told Solis, "as far as I'm concerned, they can go fuck themselves."

Which pretty much sums up how I feel about most developers looking for TIF handouts.

Solis reminded Burke of something Burke already knew—601W, or any developer, needs Finance Committee approval before it gets to eat from the TIF honey pot.

To which Burke said: "Well, good luck getting it on the agenda."

I must confess—if I had the power to bottle up needless TIF handouts, I'd be tempted

to do the same thing. Only instead of looking for business as a property tax lawyer, I want to know . . .

Why should we divert millions in property taxes from the schools for this deal when there's no money for special education?

Or, if we have money for wealthy developers, how come there's no money to fund mental health clinics in high-crime neighborhoods? Or pension payments for retired cops, firefighters, and teachers?

And other questions that never get asked, much less answered.

Alas, Burke had more personal concerns on his mind. Namely, how to get some money for his law business out of this deal. Think of it as the pinstriped-suit version of taking cash in an envelope.

By August 7, 2018, Burke apparently had gotten what he wanted. On that day, he told Solis a representative of 601W's real estate company had contacted his property tax firm, according to the federal indictment.

Solis asked Burke if he now supported TIF funding for the post office deal.

And Burke said: "Absolutely."

That's what has passed for TIF oversight by our ever-vigilant Finance Committee.

As the *Sun-Times* noted: "The proposal sailed through Burke's Finance Committee on September 17, 2018, and the City Council on September 20, 2018."

I love that line—makes me think of a little sailboat on the lake.

According to the feds, Burke expected to receive at least \$45,000 in property tax business for greenlighting the post office TIF deal. That's about \$45,000 more than the public schoolchildren of Chicago will get from this project.

Representatives of 601W released a statement saying they've been "the victim of a corrupt solicitation by" Burke. And they're voluntarily cooperating with federal prosecutors.

Like I said, I kind of understand Burke's perspective. Chicago's TIF program is a scam, as everyone should know by now.

If Mayor Rahm was dumb enough to throw millions to wealthy developers, a slimy shakedown artist like Burke would be dumb not to get himself \$45,000 here or there.

As for the rest of us? Well, we have no excuse for putting up with this bullshit any longer. 

 @joravben



Lightfoot presided over her first City Council meeting as mayor on May 29.  MAYA DUKMASOVA

POLITICS

New sheriff in town

One of Lightfoot's first acts in City Council? Putting Ed Burke in his place.

By MAYA DUKMASOVA

Rossana Rodriguez-Sanchez, newly elected alderman of the 33rd Ward, squeezed into the corner of a City Hall elevator, grinning and clutching a Starbucks cup. Others piled in only to disembark a few seconds later on the second floor, where dozens lined up to enter council chambers for the first meeting of Chicago's legislature presided over by Mayor Lori Lightfoot.

Inside the chambers on the morning of Wednesday, May 29, reporters set up in the press box. Fran Spielman of the *Sun-Times* flitted around in an ivory blazer with her tape recorder in hand and brown leather bag hoisted on her shoulder. The *Tribune's* John Kass ambled through the gallery. Suddenly, much of the press corps swarmed someone on the corner of the council floor.

"They must be talking to Scott [Waguespack]," a short, white woman in her

60s announced from the first row of the gallery. She craned her neck and stared intently at the cluster of news cameras. "I've been in the city for over 40 years, and he's the best alderman I've ever seen. I'm a math teacher, so I'm a tough grader."

The 32nd Ward alderman is Lightfoot's pick as the next chair of the council's Finance Committee. Upon approval by the full City Council, he would replace 14th Ward alderman Ed Burke, the council's longest-serving member, who's facing federal criminal charges for attempted extortion, racketeering, and bribery.

By 9:45 the aldermen had streamed in. Byron Sigcho-Lopez, freshman alderman from the 25th Ward, explained to reelected 37th Ward alderman Emma Mitts how to pronounce "Sigcho." Forty-fourth Ward alderman Tom Tunney embraced the 16th Ward's new alderman, Stephanie Coleman, who towered over him in an emerald-green dress.

NEWS & POLITICS

Forty-first Ward alderman Anthony Napolitano arrived pushing 38th Ward alderman Nicholas Sposato in his wheelchair.

Lightfoot emerged onto the dais in a dark burgundy blazer and banged the gavel. City clerk Anna Valencia began a roll call. After the pledge of allegiance and a spirited prayer led by Rabbi Megan GoldMarche, the public comment period began.

Over the next 40 minutes, 12 people took three minutes each to plead with the mayor and aldermen to address their concerns—the disappearances and murders of Black women in the city, the Lincoln Yards development, the welfare of horses pulling carriages, the state of our schools, the lack of jobs for young men, the police union contract. Perennial gadfly and public meeting speaker George Blakemore made his inaugural appearance in front of Mayor Lightfoot, delivering an impassioned tirade against Chicago's sanctuary city status.

At 10:47 the council moved on to its first order of business—approving the rules governing council procedures. These included several changes, among them provisions expanding livestreaming to committee meetings as well as full council meetings; prohibiting aldermen not just from voting on but from partaking in or presiding over debates on matters in which they have conflicts of interest; and moving TIF subsidy decision-making from the Finance Committee to the Committee on Economic, Capital and Technology Development. Eighth Ward alderman Michelle Harris, head of the Rules Committee, introduced the ordinance, and almost immediately, Burke piped up for permission to speak.

“What’s your question, sir?” Lightfoot asked. “Do you have an objection?”

Burke promised to be brief. “I think there is a serious flaw in the proposal on rules. For instance, rule two provides as follows: ‘The clerk, parenthesis, or someone appointed to fill *his* place . . .’ Burke went on to enumerate similar references to masculine pronouns in rules four and eight.

“Anything further?” Lightfoot asked, clearly impatient to move on. Burke continued citing other rules that didn’t have gender-neutral pronouns. Lightfoot interrupted.

“You’ve been in City Council for approximately 50 years, is that correct?” she asked. Burke said yes. “And you’re a lawyer?” He said yes again. Lightfoot reminded him that “under the terms of the law and particularly as provided in the municipal code, gender, whether

it’s designated as his or her, applies with equal force. So, if you’re making an objection, please make it so we can move forward.” Burke tried to say more about the pronoun-related problems, but Lightfoot had had enough. “We’ll take your issue under advisement and we’re gonna move forward.” Applause erupted from the gallery.

The rules were approved by nearly unanimous voice vote. Burke wanted to interject again, but Lightfoot didn’t let him speak. “Alderman, please,” she said, jabbing her index finger at Burke. “I will call you when I’m ready to hear from you.” (Less than 48 hours later, Lightfoot called on Burke to resign after the feds issued a 14-count indictment.)

The council approved Lightfoot’s picks for president pro tempore, who presides over council meetings in the absence of the mayor (42nd Ward alderman Brendan Reilly); vice mayor, who succeeds the mayor in the case of her untimely departure from office (Tunney); and floor leader, tasked with drumming up support for the mayor’s agenda among the other aldermen (36th Ward alderman Gilbert Villegas).

Next were the committee assignments. Technically, the City Council decides who will chair its committees, but in practice the aldermen haven’t swayed from mayoral nominations to these posts since Harold Washington became mayor in 1983 and Burke, along with two dozen other white aldermen, blocked his legislative agenda. Committee chairs decide which ordinances get debated and voted on in the council, and control budgets in the hundreds of thousands of dollars without much oversight.

Lightfoot proposed keeping five aldermen in their committee chairmanships: Harris at Rules, 27th Ward alderman Walter Burnett Jr. at Pedestrian and Traffic Safety, 19th Ward alderman Matthew O’Shea at Aviation, 12th Ward alderman George Cardenas at Environmental Protection and Energy (which was called the Health and Environment Committee under former Mayor Rahm Emanuel), and Mitts at License and Consumer Protection.

Eleven committees, however, would see new leadership: Waguespack would replace Burke at Finance. Third Ward alderman Pat Dowell would replace 34th Ward alderman Carrie Austin at Budget, and Austin would chair a new Contracting Oversight and Ethics Committee. Dowell’s old committee—Health and Human Relations—would be chaired ➔

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by Sixth Ward alderman Roderick Sawyer. Villegas would replace ex-First Ward alderman Proco Joe Moreno at Economic, Capital, and Technology Development, while 21st Ward alderman Howard Brookins Jr. would move to Transportation and Public Way from Education. Education would go to 24th Ward alderman Michael Scott Jr. Tunney would take over Zoning from 46th Ward alderman James Cappleman (who'd only been there since the resignation of former 25th Ward alderman Danny Solis in January); Tunney's prior committee—Special Events, Cultural Affairs, and Recreation—would be taken over by Sposato. Tenth Ward alderman Susan Sadlowski Garza would replace former 40th Ward alderman Patrick O'Connor as chair of Workforce Development, and 29th Ward alderman Chris Taliaferro would replace 30th Ward alderman Ariel Reboyras at Public Safety. Former 49th Ward alderman Joe Moore would be replaced at Housing and Real Estate by 48th Ward alderman Harry Osterman. Forty-third Ward alderman Michele Smith would chair the new Ethics and Good Governance Committee.

Here, another objection, this time from 15th Ward alderman Ray Lopez. "I believe you're out of order," Lightfoot said, "but I'll allow you to speak."

"I'm seriously concerned about how this is set up," he said about the committee chairs. "I'm concerned that the Latino representation has been cut in half, I'm concerned that the male-to-female ratio of chairmen is two to one. It feels like this was created in a silo without the full consideration of my colleagues here." He then addressed Lightfoot directly: "You've made it abundantly clear today that you're not trying to hear us, even now. We're trying to get your attention, even now you tried to rule me out of order when I'm clearly not." He urged the other aldermen to vote no on the chairs. "This is not good government, and this is not a good way to start."

A small crop of "no's" rose up from the floor when the vote was called. The motion passed and the chairs were approved, as were the city department heads proposed by Lightfoot.

The council then moved on to passing a litany of zoning changes, permits, and other ward-level minutiae read over 20 minutes and voted on as an omnibus motion. As the voice of a clerk droned on, announcing ordinance after ordinance, the aldermen got out of their wide leather swivel chairs, caucused in small

clusters, shook hands with and kissed people across the gallery divider, checked their phones.

Watching from the first row of the gallery, Cleopatra Watson, who unsuccessfully ran for Ninth Ward alderman against incumbent Anthony Beale and was at a full City Council meeting for the first time, was dismayed. She wondered out loud if it's normal for council members not to pay attention while proposed legislation is being read. (It is.)

By 11:25 all motions were approved and the meeting adjourned.

"So that means Scott is *officially* head of the Finance Committee?" the math teacher asked. It did. "So I can send him my congratulations card and my condolences card!" She cackled as she walked toward the exit.

Newly elected First Ward alderman Daniel La Spata walked to the back of the council floor to speak to a constituent in the gallery. He seemed a bit disoriented. "I heard my name being called, introducing ordinances today," he said. "We need to figure out what my name is attached to. Trust me, on my first day I'm not introducing any new ordinances."

"This whole meeting . . . There's a lot to get used to in terms of process," he told me. Like the rest of us in the audience, La Spata couldn't make out too well what was being called. "The sound system is not great."

A burly assistant sergeant at arms asked us to clear out of the chamber, and La Spata apologized for holding him up. "Ma'am, if you're media you should not be back here," the guard told me sternly. "If I see you back here again I'll have you escorted out."

People still milled around and bantered in the hallway outside. One of them was Amy Abramson, a member of the Friends of North Branch Park and Nature Preserve. She spoke out against the Lincoln Yards deal in the public comment period, as she had on many previous occasions. Abramson said she felt more heard than when Emanuel presided over the council: "I think she's going to take community input very seriously." She'd voted for Lightfoot and was pleased with her first meeting. "It was all business, and I would say that Mayor Lori Lightfoot handled it very well," Abramson said. "She kept everyone to the agenda, and certainly put people in their place very quickly—new sheriff in town. I was impressed. To me it looks like she's going to get what she wants." 

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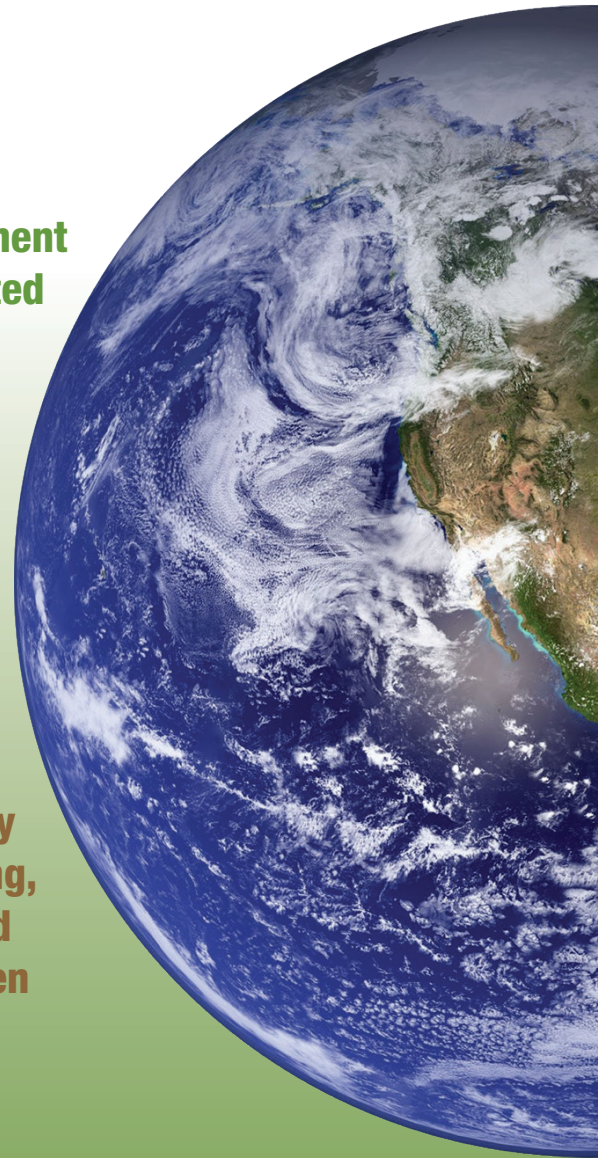
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RESTAURANT REVIEW

A (brief) guide to the food of Kerala

Clockwise from left:

Avial: a thick, coconutty vegetable medley with potatoes, beans, carrots, and squash

Sambar: the ubiquitous, thin, vegetable and lentil stew

Kadala curry: a rich black-chickpea curry

© MELISSA BLACKMON

A selection of the southwestern Indian state's greatest hits from Glenview's Kairali Foods

By **MIKE SULA**

My Malayalam is no better than my Polish. But whether you speak the language of the southwestern state of India or not, much like Polish sausages there are some obstacles in Chicago to exploring the vastly diverse food of the subcontinent's Malabar Coast. For one thing, despite some 50,000 Keralites (or Malayalis) residing in the Chicago region (largely around Glenview, Mount Prospect, Morton Grove, and Des Plaines), there are few places to eat it.

With the recent opening of Margaret Pak's

Thattu in the new West Loop food hall Politan Row, exactly one restaurant specializing in Keralite food exists anywhere in the city or the suburbs. Hers is an intriguing if brief menu (more about that later). But venture into the suburbs and you'll find a few sources that tap into the state's extraordinary culinary diversity.

The food of Kerala is "shaped by its position at the epicenter of the spice trade, resulting in centuries of exchange with Phoenicians, Arabs, Jews, Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, Chinese, Portuguese, the Dutch, and

the British." That's what I wrote about it ten years ago in a story about Royal Malabar, a Glenview-based caterer that still does a brisk carryout business for the thousands of professionals in the area who are too busy to cook dishes such as the coconut-laced meaty dry frys, the family of minced veggie dishes *thoran*, or the fermented rice-flour pancakes *appam*.

Last October, Royal Malabar's nearby competitor, Kairali Foods & Events, was taken over by a group of friends who continued to stock its tiny strip-mall grocery

HQ with an astonishing number of dishes in recyclable circular takeaway containers. The food is great, but penmanship on the containers is sometimes cryptic, and though there are quite familiar pan-Indian dishes among the 150-some item repertoire, more than a few could use some clarity for the non-Malayalis among us. What follows is a by no-means-comprehensive guide to some of the tasty things you'd encounter in Kerala, and at Kairali Foods, where you'll find the greatest selection on the weekends, each running between \$8 and \$15. **R**

Search the Reader's online database of thousands of Chicago-area restaurants—and add your own review—at chicagoreader.com/food.



From top right:

Kallumakkaya: The folks behind Kairali Foods hail from central Kerala, home to a great variety of seafood preparations. This peppery dry mussel stir-fry is a proper drinking food according to co-owner Ginesh Elackattu.

Kappa: carb-loaded mashed cassava, speckled with black mustard seeds

Chicken dum biryani: Malabar-style biryani is sealed and cooked in its own steam.

Kappa beef: one of the endless variants building on the mashed starch

Inji curry: a ginger-based condiment sweetened with jaggery and commonly eaten with dosas or idli, spongy, saucer-shaped rice cakes (not pictured)

© MELISSA BLACKMON



Thoran is an endlessly variable coconut-based dry curry of minced vegetables, typically found (like many of these foods) on a **sadhya**, a kind of smorgasbord arranged on a banana leaf. From left: an excellent mushroom thoran, beet and kale thoran, and long bean and black-eyed pea thoran, all next to the store's chewy paratha. © MELISSA BLACKMON





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FOOD & DRINK

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Clockwise from top middle:

Beef and fish cutlets: gingery minced protein molded into ovals, breaded, and fried

Samosas: smaller, more delicate versions of the ubiquitous fried dumplings

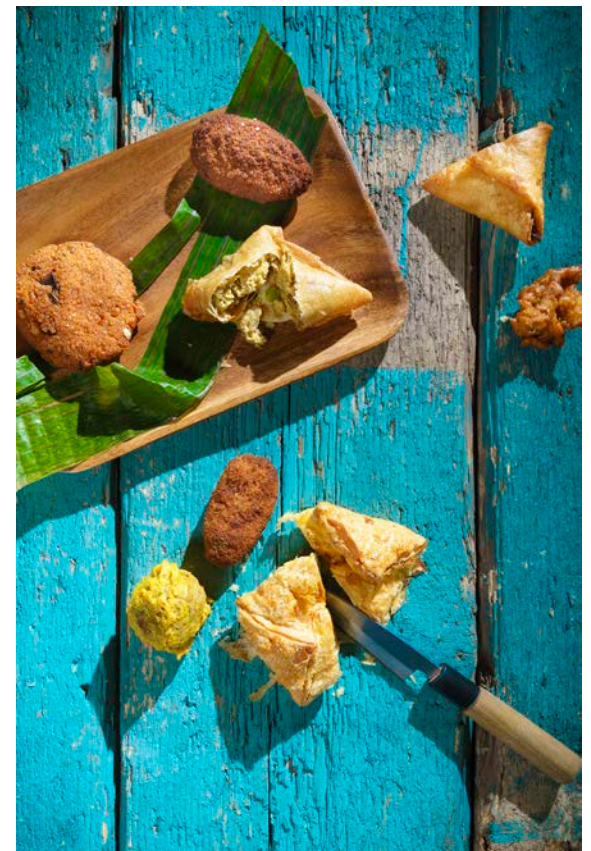
Onion pakoras: crispy onion-and-chickpea-flour nuggets

Egg puff: masala-spiced hard-cooked eggs enveloped in flaky pastry

Sukhiyan: sweet rice-flour-battered mung bean dumplings

Parrippu vada: crunchy, spicy yellow dal fritters

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From top:

Chicken “manjuria”: a surprisingly unsweetened, veggie-laden version of the Indo-Chinese staple

Pulisery: aka moru curry, a rich, spiced buttermilk curry that can act as an extinguisher to spicier dishes

Beef fry: similar to an Indonesian rendang; spicy and mined with chewy bits of coconut. Another appropriate drinking food.

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Shannon Noll PHOTOGRAPHY/RETOUCHING TOM MICHAŚ; PHOTO ASSISTANT JOSUÉ BRIONES

Just call them Shannon

Comedian Shannon Noll is using their new webseries and photo project to subvert expectations of gender and sexuality.

By BRIANNA WELLEN

Shannon Noll wasn't sure what to expect going into top surgery, partially because for so long they thought it would never be possible. But once they got a job with a tech company that offered insurance covering the procedure, they were surprised by some of the choices that had to be made. "They asked me where I want my nipples put back on, and I was like, 'Does anyone want them not in the normal place?!'"

This is indicative of how Noll handles so many things in life: by finding the funny. They are putting that philosophy into full practice

with two comedic projects that aim to change the perception of gender expectations and coming-out stories—in many ways, Noll's surgery is the culmination of both. The first, *Just Call Me Ripley*, is a webseries two years in the making loosely based on Noll's own more-funny-than-heartbreaking coming-out experience. And the second, *Corner Gulch*, is a photo series inspired directly by Noll's top surgery. The images feature stylized characters who just happen to be topless, all played by Noll, and all staged in such a way to prove that the naked female body can be more than just sexy: like a male body, it can be played for laughs.

As a performer, Noll is very open about many aspects of their life on stage—their sexuality, their gender identity, their sobriety, their family—but they manage to not let any of those things define them. Whenever Noll walks into a room, whether they are performing or not, they are just Shannon, a calm but powerful presence, always ready to crack a joke without appearing "on," and sociable with other performers and audience members alike. The bizarre, off-kilter aesthetic that drives Noll's work might not be evident on the surface, but those who know them best are all too familiar with the joyous weirdo who lies beneath.

Cassie Ahiers first met Noll ten years ago when the two were both on Columbia College Chicago's improv team, Droppin' \$cience. Right away Ahiers was impressed by Noll's strange point of view and grotesque ideas. Their shared appreciation of cringeworthy humor kept them frequent collaborators and friends long after college. In 2017 they worked together on a production that went up at iO that Ahiers calls one of the grossest things they've ever worked on together: *Trash Baby Does a Solo Show*.

Ahiers directed and Noll starred as the titular Trash Baby, a mythical garbage-loving creature who appeared in a dumpster after a ray of sun hit a crusty old tampon (hey, she warned you). During the show Trash Baby recounts the filthiest parts of their journey to Chicago, and at one point starts painting pictures of people in the audience using ketchup.

"It's supergross—you can smell the ketchup," Ahiers says. "They give them this soggy piece of paper of their portrait when they're done. People were on board for it. It really takes a charming and smart person to make people have a good time during that."

It was that path paved with tampons and ketchup that led to *Just Call Me Ripley*, seven six-minute episodes written by Noll and directed by Ahiers. The series, which premieres Saturday, June 8, follows a confused and directionless bagel shop employee, Ripley, as she struggles to make sense of her sexuality and figure out what attraction means to her. Along the way, everyone in her life, from her best friend (Kaitlin Larson) to her coworkers (Lauren Walker and Matt Brown) to a bagel shop regular (Gary Pascal), tries to define her without giving her the room to come up with the answer herself. Throughout the series Ripley learns that she can't rely on the strong personalities and points of view of those around her to make decisions about her life; in the end, it's up to her.

"I've been realizing how that gray area that a lot of human sexuality and gender fits in isn't really represented in media," Noll says. "I'm hoping this series starts to fill that gap in some way."

Noll describes the series as a coming-out story without the tears. Well, there are some tears, and some moments that tug at your heartstrings, but those are offset with over-the-top characters, nonsensical jokes, and moments of awkwardness. Each episode ➔



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Just Call Me Ripley

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is charming and authentic, but there's always a punch line that keeps things from getting too sappy and plenty of delightfully hilarious digs at the world of improv comedy.

"To me comedy isn't really even a genre, it's a medium," Ahiers says. "We wanted to showcase something that was like, 'Queer people! You're coming out, and that can be difficult, but also your life can have all these moments that are beautiful and funny.' Even the act of coming out and self-discovery, while painful and uncomfortable, can also be a funny thing. Queer people's stories aren't two-dimensional."

Adding another visual layer to the story is the use of pixelation, a stop-motion animation technique that combines live actors and, in this case, paper cutouts. Three days of the production's nine-day shoot were spent on animation, led by pixelation designer Karly Bergmann. Actors lay on a concrete floor with a camera placed directly above them, and Ahiers and Bergmann would reposition their bodies and surrounding paper cutouts just a tiny bit at a time to achieve a stop-motion animation effect. Ripley is prone to fantasy, especially when it comes to her crush on the bagel shop handywoman (Becca Brown); the pixelation scenes are a glimpse into her imagination, where she and her crush swim together underwater and float through space.

The story isn't an exact retelling of Noll's own experiences, but there are some similarities. Ripley's ex-fiance (Max Thomas) is based on Noll's boyfriend at the time they first came out (he preferred to not be named in this story). In fact, he is very much still

a part of Noll's life—he was one of the first people Noll sent the script to for feedback, and they attended his wedding last month. Other characters embody composites of several folks influential during Noll's coming out, in particular Butch Donna (the scene-stealing Abby McEnany), a butch lesbian from an older generation—the character got her nickname in a mosh pit at Lilith Fair—who really wants to be Ripley's gay Yoda. Ripley resists her guidance because Donna does not seem to have it together at all.

But make no mistake, even though there are autobiographical elements, Ripley is not Shannon and Shannon is not Ripley, at least not in their respective current forms. "It threw me for a loop for about a month afterwards, having to be in female clothes and have make-up on," Noll says. "But I feel like I've grown as a person, so some of the stupid shit that the character does I'm further away from, which feels good."

Another difference: Ripley goes by she/her pronouns while Noll goes by they/them pronouns. As a director, Ahiers is accustomed to switching between actors' names and the names of the characters they play while filming, but in this case she needed to make sure to not misgender anyone. It was an experience that sparked a conversation about how to evolve practices on set with more inclusive language.

Ahiers had the distinct advantage (and, she says, added pressure) of being a part of several of the real-life moments referenced in the series. "Being friends with Shannon for ten years, I've been witness to this kind of evolution of themselves and the finding of themselves," Ahiers says. "I felt very honored

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Just Call Me Ripley

that they felt our friendship was something that would help this project.”

Noll first started working on the script two years ago in Michael McCarthy’s writing class at Second City. They chose this particular story because it felt like one other folks could most easily connect to.

During their own coming out several years earlier, they’d scoured the Internet looking for stories that they could relate to and came up empty-handed. The template for coming out in the media seemed to be people who’d known they were gay their entire lives and could only come out once they were away from their parents or escaped their small hometown. Noll’s experience was a little different.

Noll, now 31, realized they were gay at 23 in the middle of a Meisner acting class. It hit them during an exercise that required them to repeat phrases said by another person. “My scene partner was like, ‘You’re flirting with me,’ and I was like, ‘Oh, god, now I have to say I’m flirting with you.’ Then she said, ‘You’re gay,’ and I said, ‘I’m gay.’ It felt like a cold bucket of water had been dumped on my head.”

Noll first came out to their ex as bisexual. For the first year they were sorting through their newfound identity, they stayed with their boyfriend and the two continued living together. Eventually he ended the relationship and Noll moved out and slowly started coming out as gay to everyone else.

Sometimes it was sloppy. Noll was drinking heavily at the time and would find themselves hooking up with men, then blurting, “Oh god, I’m gay!” and fleeing the scene. But mostly, it wasn’t as terrible as they imagined it might be. When Noll nervously told their grandpar-

ents, their grandma replied, “I guess you’re gonna marry a rich woman.”

It was comedy that gave them the confidence to not just come out, but be out. Noll first started doing improv at 18—originally it started as something to do other than get drunk and watch *Strangers With Candy*. Once they started, they followed a gut feeling to stick with it; they didn’t know where it would take them, but they knew it felt right. But they soon grew tired of trying to compete with loud improv comedy men to have their voice heard. After coming out, they decided to pivot to stand-up. “My first jokes were about being gay,” Noll says. “My way of dealing with it was acting like I had always been out. I started to find my voice for the very first time.”

As Noll became more involved with the stand-up world, they also became more involved with alcohol. It got so bad that they got fired from a job (one story they’re reluctant to share). Coming out led to multiple realizations at once: that they needed to get sober and that they were nonbinary. Two years ago they thought about top surgery as a real possibility.

“I was never comfortable with my chest,” Noll says. After they came out and gender dysphoria started setting in, they started disassociating from their body. In Noll’s mind, they never really had a female chest anyway. It became easier to view their boobs as props instead of a part of their anatomy. It became especially frustrating when their anatomy began to interfere with comedy.

The first time Noll realized it would be an issue was when they were 18 or 19 and taking improv classes in New York. “I don’t remember the exact scenario, but I said, ‘It would be funny if a naked woman ran through,’ ➔

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and [an older man in the group] said, ‘Naked women will always be sexy,’” Noll says. “I’ve heard it so many times since then.”

Once Noll had their top surgery scheduled, the idea for *Corner Gulch* fell into place. They wanted some physical representation of themselves before surgery but cringed at the thought of doing any kind of serious or sexy nude shoot. Then they remembered all the times men had told them their body couldn’t be funny. They decided to run with the idea of a funny, naked, character-based photo shoot while they still had the assets to represent a female body.

Photographer Jon Wes had long been a fan of Noll before they approached him with the idea for the project. He recalls first seeing them perform at Annoyance Theatre with the all-gay improv team Baby Wine and how he immediately appreciated their comedic voice. So when Noll wanted to collaborate, Wes was in without hesitation, even if the details surrounding the project weren’t fully fleshed out (pun not intended).

The vague idea of taking funny nudes eventually evolved into a series of characters created by Noll with help from Wes: a ‘luded-up housewife, a snarky hipster, and an aggro athlete slightly reminiscent of Trash Baby.

“It essentially comes down to self-definition, and especially self-definition as a non-straight man,” Noll says, “being allowed to create comedy that is completely from your own point of view and not catering to someone else’s perspective.”

The project inspired Wes, a gay man, to reflect on his own experiences. He remembered being a young boy who liked wearing dresses and high heels but who was forced to suppress those desires because, he was told, that’s not what young boys should do. He thought about all the times he kept his emotions to himself because he was told it wasn’t “masculine” to feel those things. He and Noll realized how many other people might need a similar outlet to explore and subvert those expectations in a creative and fun way.

And so came the idea of *Corner Gulch*: a backdrop for anyone and everyone to exist exactly as they would in a world with no male gaze and zero expectations based on gender, sexuality, and identity. The real Corner Gulch is actually Wes’s apartment and backyard. While talking about the project, he couldn’t contain how excited he was that a couple of queer kids (and possibly a few more) had the freedom to run around half naked together. Soon all the photos of Noll and anyone else who decides to be a part of the project will



Corner Gulch © JON WES

live at CornerGulch.com. Noll and Wes both also have ideas for booklets, gallery displays, and other ways to turn the images into a larger story.

As a longtime admirer of Noll, Wes relished the opportunity to not only work closely with them but also to see their comedic process in action. “There’s people that create comedy, and it’s funny because they take you out of it, but it doesn’t feel like it’s rooted in something that is really going on, it’s more fantastical, it’s more magical,” Wes says. “Shannon seems to somehow skirt that line of getting that, but having it come from an incredibly real and raw place. And you don’t always see it, which is the beauty of the craft that they do, but it’s there. If you look, you see that it’s a vulnerable, authentic thing that they’re bringing to the table dressed up and made magical by their imagination.”

Sometimes those moments of vulnerability do come to the forefront. When discussing their surgery in particular, Noll gets more serious. They talk about the frustration of

checking back in with their body after years of disassociating and realizing it wasn’t what they wanted it to be. They contemplate the privilege that will come as they continue presenting less and less female, something they first experienced when they first came out as gay and men in comedy started treating them as just one of the guys. They speak candidly and genuinely about going to therapy and the support they receive from friends, family, and people in the comedy and queer communities.

Noll had their surgery on May 3 and in the month since has felt more confident than ever in their body. They say they almost feel like they never had boobs at all. But still they can’t help but think of all the folks who aren’t able to afford the surgery, and how people need to stop relying on “traditional” markers like changes to one’s anatomy to see people as actually trans. Even as Noll opens up and gets serious, they can’t help but throw a joke into the mix. “I’m a pack rat,” Noll says. “Like, if I could have kept my boobs in a jar I would have, but this is way more sanitary.”



Both the webseries and the photo shoot act as that metaphorical jar for Noll, not just as a record of their body, but a documentation of a very specific time and journey in their life. Noll’s collaborators on both projects acknowledge their potential to grow into a longer webseries and a more collaborative photo project. And the possibilities for Noll’s career as a stand-up, writer, and performer seem endless. But no matter what changes for Noll in the next ten years, professionally or personally, they’ll still just always be Shannon.

“Shannon has just always been a very generous and warm and kind person, fun energy, always just a little bit off, but in just the best way,” Ahiers says. “On one hand it’s like, wow I’ve seen you change a lot in terms of your outward appearance and how you’re introducing yourself to the world, but in the same sense, Shannon is just the same fucking weirdo that I’ve known all along.”

@BriannaWellen



ARTS & CULTURE



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PRIDE

All sound is queer

Four significant moments in LGBTQ pop music history

By SALEM COLLO-JULIN

Drew Daniel, a member the electronica duo Matmos, a gay man, and a favorite contemporary philosopher of mine posits in his essay “All Sound Is Queer” that sound itself is a connection we have to the multiverse, where our beings themselves exist to cocreate our identities and worlds—but because sound can live both above and below the limits of human frequency, sound lives both with us and in realms we cannot know. It is above and below our boundaries of perception. Just as with gaydar, some of us get glimpses of the sounds outside of our natural abilities, and we are drawn to the shadow, the gray area, the twilight. Here are just a few moments in which music allowed us to go into the back room and feel it.

1925: Ma Rainey is arrested for hosting an lesbian orgy

Ma Rainey was part of the first generation of professional African American blues singers in the late teens and early 20s. Many of her lyrics included the stories of tough women and thinly veiled references to bisexual or lesbian life. In 1925, Rainey was arrested here in Chicago for “running an indecent party” after the police were summoned by a neighbor’s noise complaint; CPD officers allegedly found Rainey and several of the women from her chorus and touring show in various states of undress. Legend says that fellow as-out-as-possible-at-the-time bisexual blues singer Bessie Smith paid Rainey’s bail. Rainey’s 1928 song, “Prove It On Me Blues,” seems to reference the scandal: “They say I do it, ain’t nobody caught me / Sure got to prove it on me / Went out last night with a crowd of my

friends / They must’ve been women, ‘cause I don’t like no men.”

Early 1950s: Little Richard meets Esquerita

Little Richard claimed in a 1985 episode of the British documentary series *South Bank Show* that he first saw the amazing performer who dubbed himself Esquerita walking off a bus at the Greyhound station in Macon, Georgia, in the early 1950s. You can see and hear Esquerita’s direct influence on Little Richard’s subsequent hairstyle and piano playing: his pounding technique and flippant vocal attitude are directly lifted from Esquerita’s performances, though Little Richard’s most successful songs are the “radio clean” versions. Sadly, we’ll never know just how popular Esquerita’s music could have been because, up until his death in 1986, he always kept it too weird for the straights.

1969: Maxine Feldman writes “Angry Atthis”

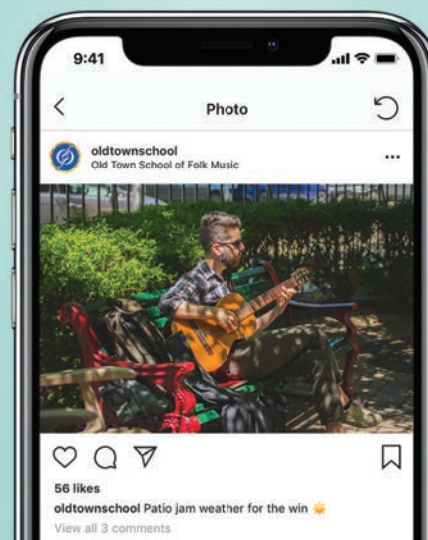
Maxine Feldman began performing as an openly lesbian folk singer starting in 1964. (In later years, Feldman identified as transgender.) In a 2002 interview, they explained that their most famous song, “Angry Atthis,” was an explicit protest. Feldman wrote it in May 1969, and, while not directly connected, it anticipated the famous disruption at the Stonewall Inn that happened later that summer: “Feel like we’re animals in cages / And have you seen the lights in the gay bar / Not revealing wrinkles or rages / God forbid we reveal who we are.”

1985: Wendy Carlos in *People* magazine

The pioneer musician and composer and godmother of electronic music Wendy Carlos is a trans woman who had some of her earliest commercial success at a time when she was first receiving hormone treatments (for a “psychological condition known as gender dysphoria,” *People* helpfully explained). Carlos was anxious about making public appearances, but she began to feel more comfortable after she decided to come out in a 1979 interview in *Playboy* magazine. Carlos told *People*, “The public turned out to be amazingly tolerant or, if you wish, indifferent. . . . There had never been any need of this charade to have taken place. It had proven a monstrous waste of years of my life.”

@hollo

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REVIEW

Jumping the shark—er, falls

Queen of the Mist somehow manages to render the story of the woman who went over Niagara Falls in a barrel “tedious, monotonous, repetitive, and not fun.”

By CATEY SULLIVAN

Michael John LaChiusa’s musical *Queen of the Mist* contains a second-act song that critiques its heroine Anna Edson Taylor’s lackluster performance on the lecture circuit recounting her 1901 trip over Niagara Falls in a barrel. The lyrics ask how she’s managed to make such an inherently thrilling adventure sound so “tedious, monotonous, repetitive, and not fun.” It’s an apt critique of the show itself, directed by Elizabeth Margolius in this Firebrand production starring Barbara E. Robertson as Taylor. (Full disclosure: I saw the show’s final preview performance before opening.)

LaChiusa tries to portray Anna (sometimes called “Annie”) as a misunderstood genius ahead of her time brought low by a patriarchal society that demands women be ruled by men and not look for happiness outside marriage and children. But his script makes Anna come off as childish and spoiled rather than remark-

able or forward-thinking. Her insistence that her “haters” are people who despise “artists” and “thinkers” is pure delusion: Anna’s haters are the people she tries to swindle, including well-meaning family members. *Queen* asks its audience to spend two and a half hours with a protagonist who is obnoxious and unchanging.

QUEEN OF THE MIST
Through 7/6: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM,
Sun 3 PM, Den Theatre, 1331
N. Milwaukee, 872-903-3473,
firebrandtheatre.org, \$55, \$20
students and industry, \$15 rush.

Anna’s not the only one-note woman. Carrie Nation (Liz Chidester) is a mean-girl harri-dan. Anna’s sister Jane (Neala Barron) is a homemaker with the depth of Betty Crocker. Finally, there’s an unnamed burlesque floozy (also Barron) who evokes Mae West, minus the wit and charisma. For a musical that purports to be about a remarkably singular woman, it’s



Queen of the Mist MICHAEL BROSILOW

thin gruel indeed. The primary fault lies in the script, but it’s exacerbated by Margolius’s ensemble and the heightened, melodramatic acting style it deploys throughout. Between the dialogue and the direction, *Queen* is pure cheese.

As Anna’s manager (and lover?), Frank, Max Cervantes never seems convincingly beguiled by his client. Initially Frank takes a hard pass when Anna asks him to be her manager, but he inexplicably changes his mind in short order. Like everyone else, Frank is saddled with laughably torrid dialogue. Consider such melodramatic gems such as “I couldn’t bear to watch you die, it was too much to bear, dammit!” or “You’re a coward, dammit!” or (my personal favorite) “WHO STOLE MY BARREL?” Then there’s the awkward mixed metaphor in Anna’s startling second-act declaration: “You pointed out a door was open and I escaped by the chimney flue.” Yes, it’s a takeoff on a well-known proverb, but it’s also impossible to hear without thinking of Anna stuffed into a chimney the same way she was stuffed into the barrel, and it renders ridiculous what is intended to be a serious moment.

The most annoying thing about *Queen*, though, is its failure to address the big event. The show is a tease: It’s about going over Niagara Falls in a barrel, except it’s really not because we never hear a word about the actual experience. On her speaking tour, Taylor is confused when people ask her to describe how

it felt to defy death and plummet hundreds of feet into a roiling abyss. Why does she make the unbelievably peculiar decision not to talk about the thing that she decided to do so she could make money talking about it? LaChiusa never explains.

LaChiusa’s score is not without merit. Firebrand’s small ensemble under Charlotte Rivard-Hoster’s musical direction delivers a lovely sound. When the cast sings of Niagara’s mesmerizing, lethal allure and the ancient Native American lore surrounding it, *Queen* shines. So too during “Break Down the Door,” a banging production number about temperance led by Chidester’s pile-driving Carrie Nation. But Robertson struggles with pitch throughout, especially when the notes hit the upper register.

Moreover, Margolius uses far too much stylized slo-mo in her blocking. It feels like the actors are slogging through invisible pudding for a good quarter of the proceedings. The Fogmaster 5,000 gets a likewise heavy workout, which is to be expected with a show that literally has the word “mist” in the title. Still, the stage fog often is so pervasive it’s difficult to see the actors.

There’s a great story in Taylor’s endeavor. We don’t get that here. You have heard of jumping the shark? This is a show that jumps the entire falls. **F**

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Photo: Joe Mazza.

THEATER



Falsettos
by JOAN MARCUS

OPENING

RR Neurotic erotica Both love and *Falsettos* endure.

Halfway through the first act of *Falsettos*, Trina, a woman whose husband has left her for a younger man and who is on the verge of remarriage to her husband's therapist, sings, "I'm tired of all the happy men who rule the world. They grow—of that I'm sure. They grow—but don't mature."

But the men in William Finn and James Lapine's 1992 musical (revived under Lapine's direction at Lincoln Center in 2016 and now making a brief but glorious touring appearance here) are neither as happy nor as powerful as Trina imagines. Marvin (Max von Essen), her ex, is a deeply insecure control freak who wants both "A Tight Knit Family," as he sings early on, with Trina (Eden Espinosa) and their preadolescent son, Jason (Thatcher Jacobs, alternating with Jonah Mussolino), as well as the monogamous devotions of Whizzer (Nick Adams), his new paramour. Mendel (Nick Blaemire) is the wry shrink in the middle of the mess.

Constructed out of two earlier one-acts, *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland*, the show provides a keen (if occasionally self-conscious) portrait of life before and after the onset of the AIDS epidemic, when families of both blood and affinity found themselves forced to mature in a hurry. Finn's gorgeous score sets self-lacerating lyrics against a complex musical landscape that the cast navigates with wit and full-voiced depth. When David Rockwell's fanciful set of gray playing blocks gives way to a realistic hospital room, we know that playtime is over—but love can endure.—**KERRY REID**
FALSETTOS Through 6/9: Wed 2 and 7:30 PM, Thu-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 2 and 8 PM, Sun 2 PM, Tue 7:30 PM, James M. Nederlander Theatre, 24 W. Randolph, 800-775-2000, broadwayinchicago.com, \$27-\$98.

RR Family matters *Four Places* hovers brilliantly between public pleasantries and private dysfunction.

It's their weekly lunch date. They're sitting in the restaurant where she and her daughter always go, where she has her usual order of Caesar salad with salmon bits and a rum and Diet Coke (OK, three), and where the waitress fusses over her like a favorite customer. "Poetry is in the

details," Peggy (Meg Thalken) tells her children, Ellen (Amy Montgomery) and Warren (Bruch Thomas Reed), who has joined them this week. "Not the similes. Not the obvious metaphors."

Joel Drake Johnson gets the details of this family's most uncomfortable lunch just right in *Four Places*, in which adult children confront the past and future lives of their aging parents, a confrontation that occurs amid the petty frustrations, the major mishaps, and the minor beauties (the wrong ketchup, the lost spouses, a bit of Mozart on the piano) of personal histories that sometimes only seem to intersect by happenstance and other times produce each other. The dialogue stabs with mundane authenticity.

Against the ostentatious hamming of the others, Thalken demonstrates the utmost mastery of her craft in her virtuosic performance as Peggy, who is cantankerous, hilarious, heartbreaking, and sincere in her every breath and gesture. Under Lia Mortensen's direction *Four Places* hovers brilliantly between both the syrupy pleasantries of social and commercial discourse and the private humiliation of bodily dysfunction, the idealized roles of parents and children and their disappointing realities.—**IRENE HSIAO** **FOUR PLACES** Through 6/30: Wed-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 3 PM, Den Theatre, 1331 N. Milwaukee, 773-697-3830, thedentheatre.com, \$38, \$33 students and seniors.

The best is silence *Trap Door's The Killer* needs a little less conversation and a little more action, please.

Eugène Ionesco's loud, absurdist farce about an everyman desperately attempting to escape his gray existence while tracking a mysterious killer gets a spirited, fully committed treatment at Trap Door. Béranger (a sweaty, desperate Dennis Bisto) blunders upon a beautiful neighborhood he's never seen before. The area is overseen by a sinister, leering architect (Michael Mejia), who gives Béranger a tour but keeps disappearing to put out bureaucratic fires. All is not as rosy as it seems here, but Béranger is convinced that a move to this district will cure all that ails him.

What follows is a series of nonsensical fever-pitch vignettes in which Béranger, by turns hysterical and confused, tries to unmask the identity of a killer stalking the city while clinging to the long-shot hope that his own prospects will somehow improve in the process.

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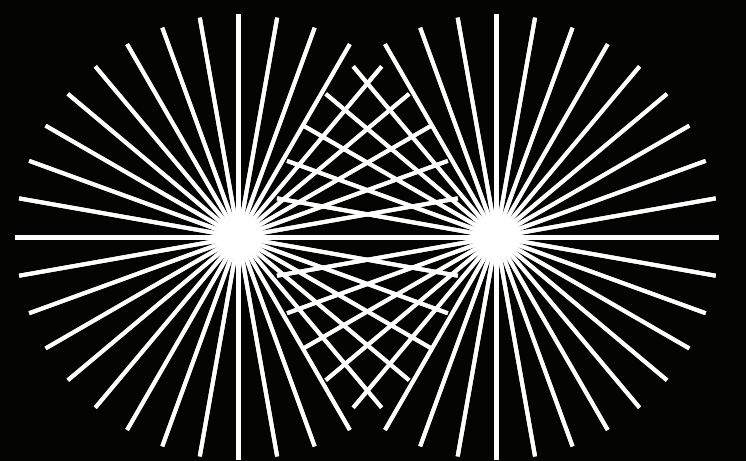
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THEATER

► types performing an endless pantomime throughout the play communicate Ionesco's critique of modern life much more effectively than the lengthy philosophical harangues that punctuate it. As with almost every Trap Door production I've ever been to, this one is chock-full of expressive moments and striking staging, but after a time, Ionesco's words start sounding like nails on a chalkboard. I kept waiting for the quiet moments where Béranger and the rest of the ghoulish citizens of this nameless city go through the motions of their sad lives. The cry in these movements hits a lot closer than a thousand shouted syllables. Mike Steele directed. —DMITRY SAMAROV **THE KILLER** Through 7/5: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Trap Door Theatre, 1655 W. Cortland, 773-384-0494, trapdoortheatre.com, \$20-\$25, two for one on Thursday.

RR Lick Bush in '92!
Ms. Blakk for President celebrates a great queer pioneer.

Neon shades of violet—not rainbows—radiate from Tarell Alvin McCraney and Tina Landau's world-premiere docu-party celebrating the true story of queer activist Terence Alan Smith, aka drag queen Joan Jett Blakk. That choice of color in David Zinn and Heather Gilbert's euphoric and chaotic scenic and lighting design feels like more than just a chic and clubby aesthetic choice: staged at a time when mainstream American culture is advancing the rights of some queer communities while regressing them for others, Landau's production recalls, via loudspeakers and bold-type signage, real-life historical rallying cries for the margins of the margins.

In 1992, those came from organizations such as ACT UP and Queer Nation, which rallied on behalf of people whose life expectancy did not allow for incrementalism or center-right apologists within the Democratic Party. Set during Blakk's 1992 protest bid for the White House, McCraney (who also stars as Smith/Blakk) pays homage to the punk spirit of Smith's activism without losing sight of her vulnerabilities and shortcomings. Mixing traditional, beat-by-beat narrative, metatheatrical asides, and fantasy sequences in which Marilyn Monroe (Sawyer Smith) offers cryptic, prophetic inspiration, *Ms. Blakk for President* plays out like a visual and narrative kaleidoscope of Ms. Blakk's journey to the Democratic National Convention floor. It inspires and agitates and proselytizes, even if the plot at the center is relatively slight.

I'm not convinced that's really a negative, though; in unearthing this lesser-known story, McCraney and Landau showcase the work of a queer pioneer who damn well knew she wouldn't reap the awards of her labor, and dug in her heels, anyway. —DAN JAKES **MS. BLAKK FOR PRESIDENT** Through 7/14: Wed 2 and 7:30 PM, Thu-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat-Sun 3 and 7:30 PM, Tue 7:30 PM; no performance Wed 6/5, 6/12, and 7/10, Thu 7/4, 2 PM; or Sun 6/23-7/14, 7:30 PM, Steppenwolf Theatre, 1650 N. Halsted, 312-335-1650, steppenwolf.org, \$35-\$99.

Is it a little steamy in here?
If it's Pride Month, it must be time for
Steamworks: The Musical.

Al from Nebraska (Ben Cumings) goes searching for love through the heavy steam of a Boystown bathhouse in this endearing Pride Month offering at the Annoyance, now in its third staging since 2012. The show, which is sponsored in part by the actual Steamworks, has

plenty of cute songs and memorable prop action to its credit. Witness the instructional ballad on poor Jacuzzi hygiene in act one, featuring a gang of tiny turd puppets with mouths, flanked by singing gobs of sperm. Brittany Flynn shines in her star turn as sexually frustrated Carol, the Queen of Boystown. And Al's hairy-chested beloved, the Bradley Cooper to his Lady Gaga (the two are invoked a lot here, hilariously), is played with ineluctable goofy charm by Kyle Deininger. Plus, his character rejoices in his own name—and I cannot stress this enough—of "Stephen Stefan." Stephen. Freaking. Stefan. Oh, yeah.

From roughly ten minutes into the play until final bows, everybody onstage with the exception of Carol is pretty much naked to the waist, or else robed in pink muslin or cheap leopard print with the belt undone. No one can really sing, and at times the incessant doubling down on retrograde gay stereotypes loses its campy verve and gets to feeling uncomfortable. That being said, this fun, proud chant from the depths of Chicago's big gay heart, if it fails to do anything else, goes great with a beer and some tots. Parker Callahan directs. —MAX MALLER **STEAMWORKS: THE MUSICAL** Through 8/9: Fri 8 PM, Annoyance Theatre, 851 W. Belmont, 773-697-9693, theannoyance.com, \$24, \$20 students.

Alternate reality
Take Me is undermined by its own whimsy.

Imaginative and often beautiful visual projections by designer Tony Churchill transform Strawdog Theatre's intimate, low-ceilinged performing area into an otherworldly environment for *Take Me*, by playwright (and Reader contributor) Mark Guarino and songwriter Jon Langford, a quirky world premiere directed by Anderson Lawfer.

It's the story of Shelley (the engaging Nicole Bloomsmith), a service representative for a wireless telephone carrier, who one day is contacted by aliens—or so she believes. As the action unfolds, shifting confusingly between reality and fantasy, we come to understand that this outer-space connection is all in Shelley's mind. Her delusion is driven by guilt and grief over the disappearance of her little boy—kidnapped from an amusement park after she carelessly left him in his stroller while she purchased some cotton candy—and the fate of her husband (Michael Reyes), an airline pilot who is surviving on life support in a vegetative state after being the sole survivor of a plane crash.

The high stakes of this premise are unintentionally trivialized by the odd and sometimes whimsical "alternative reality" into which Shelly retreats, a world populated by characters only she can see. These include her childhood toy Doggie (Kamille Dawkins); a trio of Soviet space dogs; and, best of all, Travis (Carmine Grisolia), a freewheeling country singer who has been abducted by extraterrestrials.

Langford, best known as one of the founding members of the Mekons, has penned a handful of songs that benefit greatly from the twangy rock arrangements by Annabelle Revak. A live band under Chuck Evans's musical direction accompanies the able and earnest cast of singer-actors; the musicians are dimly visible through an upstage scrim, but the show would be considerably enhanced if they were placed center stage. —ALBERT WILLIAMS **TAKE ME** Through 6/22: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 4 PM, Strawdog Theatre, 1802 W. Berenice, 773-644-1380, strawdog.org, \$35, \$26 seniors. **A**



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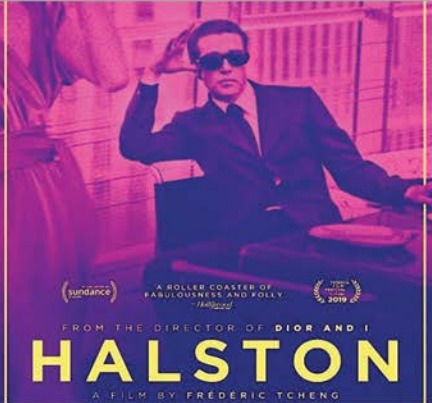
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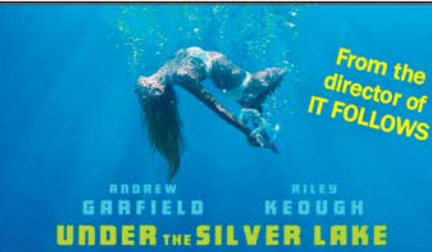
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FILM



Asako I & II

ASAKO I & II ★★★

Directed by Ryûsuke Hamaguchi. In Japanese with subtitles. 120 min. Fri 6/7-Thu 6/13. Gene Siskel Film Center, 164 N. State, 312-846-2800, siskelfilmcenter.org, \$11.

REVIEW

Modern melodrama

In *Asako I & II* Ryûsuke Hamaguchi wonders whether human longing is innate or instilled by something beyond us.

By **BEN SACHS**

govern our lives are. For this reason, the melodrama will always have something to teach us, as new generations come to see through different conventions. No filmmaker understood this better than Rainer Werner Fassbinder, whose postmodern melodramas tore apart the illusions of postwar political optimism and heteronormative mores, but other directors who have emerged since his untimely passing have utilized the genre just as perceptively.

On the basis of his new feature *Asako I & II* (2018), Japanese writer-director Ryûsuke Hamaguchi appears to be one of these filmmakers. His innovation here is to deliver melodramatic material with naturalistic, even understated performances and mise-en-scène, and this strategy has the effect of rendering both naturalism and melodrama uncanny. Presenting nonnatural contrivances within otherwise realistic settings, Hamaguchi suggests that the forces governing our lives are not simply arbitrary but practically paranormal. He subtly heightens the impact of this theme by frequently shifting the film's perspective between its two main characters. Just when we think we understand one protagonist's emotional drive, Hamaguchi will direct us to consider the other; in doing so, he preserves the power of melodramatic convention while developing a sense of mystery around each of his subjects.

That mysteriousness starts to blossom as early as the first sequence. The title character (Erika Karata), a woman in her early 20s living in Osaka, goes to an art gallery to observe a photography exhibit by Shigeo Gocho. A shaggy-haired young man crosses her path, and when she leaves the gallery, she notices he's walking in front of her. (Hamaguchi keeps it ambiguous as to whether she chooses to follow him.) Outside the building, the man stops and turns to introduce himself to Asako. He says his name is Baku, then apprehensively

“**M**elodrama” has become something of a pejorative term for many of my colleagues, but I still see it as a neutral descriptor.

The genre is associated with heightened emotions and blatant narrative contrivances; some viewers (and critics) scoff at these qualities, but I think they're no more inherently silly than any of the tropes we associate with modern horror or action films. Moreover, I think they remain, when applied thoughtfully, useful tools for understanding the human condition. After all, who hasn't experienced heightened emotional states at moments of crisis or epiphany? As for the narrative contrivances of melodrama, I believe they have the potential to make audiences realize how arbitrary so many social conventions that



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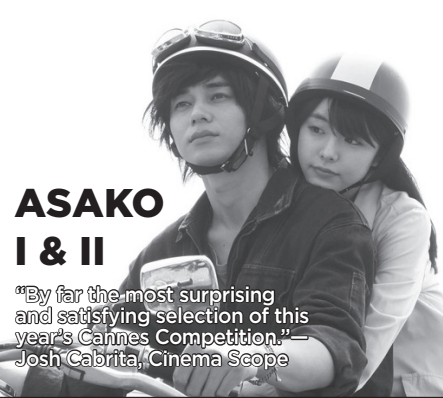
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moves to caress her. He leans in for a kiss, and Asako, though apparently shocked, kisses him back. Out of nowhere, it seems, two lives are transformed by romantic passion. Cut to some time later, when the two explain in a restaurant how they fell in love to one of Baku's curious friends. That the two have apparently developed into a happy couple is no less surprising than the spark that brought them together originally.

The next several scenes depict Asako and Baku's love affair without revealing much about either character. Hamaguchi divulges that Baku's a club DJ with a tendency to act out violently; as for Asako, she remains something of a blank, apart from her desire to love and be loved. In one unnerving moment, the lovers get into a motorcycle accident, then start kissing on the pavement next to the totaled bike after they realize they're OK. One evening after dinner at Baku's apartment, Baku says he's going out to buy bread and doesn't return.

His roommate tells Asako that Baku's father is in intensive care and Baku sometimes acts on his grief by disappearing for weeks at a time. Baku shows up the following morning, and Asako forgives him; as she embraces him, she explains in voice-over that six months later he will disappear for good.

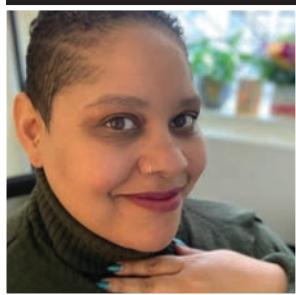
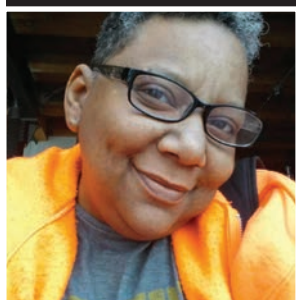
Hamaguchi then cuts to two years after Baku's disappearance. We are now in an office building in Tokyo, and Masahiro Higashide, the actor who played Baku, now appears in the guise of a short-haired salaryman. After Hamaguchi presents a few details of his work, Asako enters. She works in a coffee shop next door to the office and has come to retrieve a coffeepot. Shocked by the sight of her old lover, she begins asking the man personal questions; only now is it revealed that this isn't Baku, but a different character, Ryôhei. Hamaguchi follows up this melodramatic development with another one a couple scenes later, when Asako bumps into Baku again that

evening outside a gallery showing another Shigeo Gocho exhibit. Is this déjà vu, or a sign that Asako is meant to be with the familiar-looking stranger? Ryôhei ends up joining Asako and her roommate, Maya, at the exhibit, and the three make plans to meet again. Soon enough, and despite Asako's trepidation, she and Ryôhei become a couple.

Hamaguchi depicts the pair's ensuing romance with the same sociological curiosity about middle-class ritual he brought to his previous feature, the realist epic *Happy Hour* (2015). In fact the film's placid realism would verge on dullness if it weren't for Ryôhei's resemblance to Baku and our knowledge that Asako wrestles with this fact every time she looks at him. *Asako I & II* develops suspense through the implicit question of whether the heroine likes her new boyfriend for himself or because he reminds her of the all-consuming passion she once experienced with another man.

This opens up another, age-old melodramatic question: Is it possible to live for spontaneous romantic love? Hamaguchi would seem to think it's not, given his insistence on quiet, respectable naturalism. Yet his insistence doesn't feel decisive—the questions he raises are never fully resolved. This lack of resolution stems from Hamaguchi's deliberately vague characterization of Asako; for all the detail he brings to the film's surface activity, the character's inner life is always tantalizingly unclear. Ryôhei emerges as the more relatable character, as his puzzlement over Asako's motivation mirrors the audience's. That puzzlement has a certain metaphysical twinge, generated in part by the film's frisson between naturalism and melodrama; Hamaguchi keeps us guessing as to whether the characters' longings are innate or instilled by something beyond them and us. **R**

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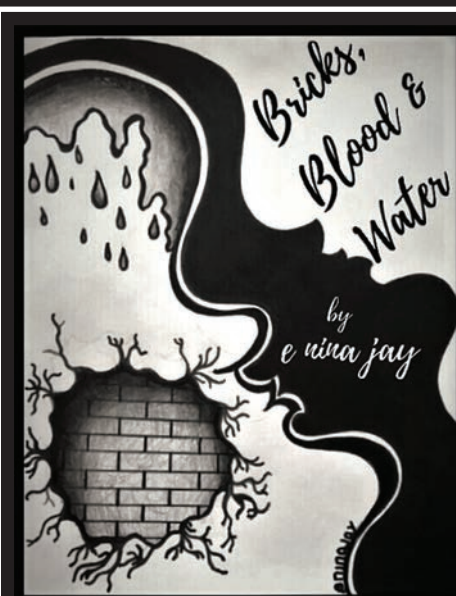
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NOW PLAYING

N Always Be My Maybe

What ever happened to the one that got away? Nahnatchka Khan's first feature explores this popular rom-com trope with fresh eyes. Sasha (Ali Wong) and Marcus (Randall Park) were childhood sweethearts until life got in the way and they drifted apart. Fifteen years later, Sasha is a wealthy celebrity chef while Marcus plays in a shitty band, smokes a lot of weed, and still lives with his dad. It's a breath of fresh air to see patriarchal power dynamics reversed, but the film's treatment of class is surface level: even though it should be integral to the plot, it's never directly addressed and falls by the wayside. No matter what, though, Wong and Park's chemistry will charm the pants off of you—and the film's sheer gusto makes it one of the more memorable additions in Netflix's batch of otherwise safe romantic comedies. —**CODY CORRALL** PG-13, 101 min. Streaming on Netflix

N Amazing Grace

Director Sydney Pollack's long-shelved film of two January 1972 gospel concerts headlined by Aretha Franklin at the New Temple Missionary Baptist Church in Watts, then the cultural epicenter of Black LA, has been completed by codirector Alan Elliott following the deaths of Pollack in 2008 and Franklin ten years later. During her lifetime Franklin had blocked its release because the earlier version was not shot in synchronous sound, a colossal snafu in a vehicle meant to complement her eponymous album recorded over those two nights, and which went double platinum. Thanks to cutting-edge digital technology that facilitated a postproduction match-up of sound and image, the work as it stands now has considerable merit as a document recorded during a watershed period of the American civil rights movement. As a concert film, it's elevated by Franklin's powerhouse three-octave range and soulful phrasing, not to mention her harmonious backup, Reverend James Cleveland's Southern California Community Choir, directed by the uncommonly charismatic Alexander Hamilton (then only 27). The program's 14 standards provide a worthy introduction to gospel music for anyone unfamiliar with the genre, and also reference gospel's ties to pop hits like Carole King's *You've Got a Friend* and George Harrison's *My Sweet Lord*. But viewed simply as a movie, it lacks oomph, despite the presence in the audience of Mick Jagger and Charlie Watts and of Aretha's father, the Reverend C.L. Franklin, arriving resplendent in an impeccably tailored blue suit, and struggling, perhaps, with being eclipsed by his daughter. One has to wonder what footage wound up on the cutting-room floor, because the end product falls a little flat when everything clearly was meant to soar. —**ANDREA GRONVALL** G, 87 min. Fri 6/7, 2 and 6 PM; Sat 6/8, 5:15 and 7:45 PM; Sun 6/9, 3 PM; Mon 6/10, 6 and 8 PM; Tue 6/11, 8:15 PM; Wed 6/12, 6 PM; and Thu 6/13, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

RR The Bad News Bears

Michael Ritchie keeps his dead-end cynicism in check and produces a genuinely funny comedy (1976) about a Little League team managed by a lovably drunken Walter Matthau. Sometimes Ritchie goes too far in avoiding the family-movie clichés the subject invites and indulges in some pointless vulgarity, but all in all, it's one of his best films. —**DAVE KEHR** PG, 102 min. Tue 6/11–Thu 6/13, 10:30 PM. Logan



The Feeling of Being Watched

Belly

It's not the convoluted yet obvious plot of this 1998 drama about the domestic lives and criminal careers of two childhood friends (DMX and Nas) that draws you in—it's the splendid visuals. Set mainly in New York City and Omaha, where these drug dealers do business according to their different ambitions, the movie is an image opera that deftly turns visual gimmicks into potent symbols. The interiors are cloaked in darkness or stripped bare by hard-edged lighting and the exteriors' striking color schemes are hyperreal yet somehow not flashy. Writer-director Hype Williams uses this expressive visual language to speak harshly and wistfully, simply and savvily of the characters' sobering submission to the law of supply and demand. —**LISA ALSPECTOR** R, 96 min. 35mm. Fri 6/7–Sat 6/8, midnight; and Wed 6/12, 9:30 PM. Music Box

N Dark Phoenix

In this final installment in the X-Men saga and the first directed by screenwriter Simon Kinberg, a combination of power and pride nearly defeats the superhero team once and for all. After Jean Grey (Sophie Turner) absorbs a powerful cosmic force, she must decide whether she will choose her X-Men family or her foes to guide her into her next stage of life. At its heart, this film is a close examination of family and the lies we tell to keep those we care about close at hand. Love wins, as it always does in stories like this, and the villain (Jessica Chastain) is forced to realize that having people who care for you often trumps being the mightiest person in the galaxy. Turner delivers a solid performance as a young woman coming to grips with an unknown force, and James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender maintain the frenemy bond we've grown to love. This film is an all right sendoff to nearly 20 years of storytelling but leaves one wondering what can possibly come next. —**ATAVIA REED** PG-13, 161 min. Block 37, ArcLight, Century 12 and CineArts 6, Chatham 14, Cicero Showplace 14, City North 14, Ford City, Lake Theatre, Navy Pier IMAX, River East 21, Showplace 14 Galewood Crossings, Showplace ICON, 600 N. Michigan, Webster Place 11

RR N The Fall of the American Empire

With this erotic, barbed satire, French Canadian writer-

director Denys Arcand returns to the preoccupations of his first U.S. art-house hit, the politically charged 1986 sex comedy *The Decline of the American Empire*, which began a trilogy that eventually included his Oscar-winning *The Barbarian Invasions* (2003) and the less successful *The Age of Ignorance* (aka *Days of Darkness*, 2007). In *Fall* he again skewers rapacious capitalism, this time refining the generic conventions of a well-paced heist film. One day on the job as a parcel delivery man, a dishy but shy progressive Montreal intellectual (Alexandre Landry) witnesses a bank robbery gone wrong and impulsively scoops up the two cash-stuffed duffels left behind after the carnage. Committed to improving the lives of the homeless, he sees a chance to convert the stolen loot (which turns out to be laundered drug money) into opportunity for the city's impoverished and struggling working stiff and seeks out the help of an ex-con (Rémy Girard) who studied offshore investment law while incarcerated, as well as that of a fat-cat financier (Pierre Curzi) whose former mistress, a brainy hooker (Maripier Morin), likes the hero's books as much as his looks. The quips fly left (-wing) and right, and Landry and Morin provide ample eye candy; for those who prefer their larcenous high jinks leavened by a serious social conscience, this ebullient romp is just the ticket. In English and subtitled French. —**ANDREA GRONVALL** R, 127 min. Fri–Sun 6/7–6/9, 10:55 AM, 1:40, 4:35, 7:20, and 10:10 PM; and Mon 6/10–6/13, 1:40, 4:35, 7:20, and 10:10 PM. Century Centre Cinema

RR N The Feeling of Being Watched

In the years since 9/11, the erosion of individual privacy has become a gnawing concern for many Americans. But while news of the government's mass surveillance of its own citizens may have come as a shock to white Americans who believed they would be protected under the law, people from marginalized groups were surely less surprised. As journalist Assia Boundaoui recounts in her vital documentary, being watched by the government was normal in the Muslim community of southwest-suburban Bridgeview where she grew up. She interviews family members, friends, and neighbors who recall strange men infiltrating their neighborhood for decades: fiddling with telephone wires on the street late at night and rummaging through their trash, among other more explicit intrusions. Indeed, they were being

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tracked and recorded by the FBI through a counter-intelligence initiative, code-named "Operation Vulgar Betrayal," which dated back to at least 1985. Boundaoui takes the FBI to federal court in order to compel the release of documentation about her community; in doing so, she investigates the heavy toll that their invasion placed upon her and her loved ones. This should be required viewing for all Americans, but especially those who think they couldn't possibly be living in a surveillance state. —**LEAH PICKETT** 86 min. Boundaoui attends the screenings. Sat 6/8, 4:30 PM; Sun 6/9, 2 PM; and Mon 6/10, 4 PM. Music Box

Frida

In bringing painter Frida Kahlo to the big screen (2002), Salma Hayek chose as her director Julie Taymor, whose first film, *Titus*, featured stunning visuals—coups de theatre in cinematic terms. Similar touches can be found in *Frida*, notably the impressionistic handling of the street-car accident that resulted in a lifetime of pain for the artist; a witty montage that takes Kahlo and her husband, muralist Diego Rivera (a typically robust performance from Alfred Molina), from Mexico to New York; and a sequence in which Rivera becomes King Kong to Kahlo's Fay Wray. But as with all biopics, there are deadening moments, as when Frida is introduced to Tina Modotti (uh, Ashley Judd) at a party. This is the Classics Illustrated version of Kahlo's story—fun mostly for the sets and the clothes. —**MEREDITH BRODY** R, 123 min. Tue 6/11, 6:30 PM. Pritzker Pavilion, Millennium Park FREE

The Furies

One of the more extreme of the Freudian westerns that were briefly in vogue in the late 40s and early 50s, this Anthony Mann film (1950) settles on the Electra complex for its inspiration, as Barbara Stanwyck does battle with her cattle baron father (Walter Huston). Mann was one of Hollywood's few classically trained talents; he had long dreamed of doing a westernized *King Lear*, and this baroque, oppressive film was as close as he came. Still, it's a disappointment—cluttered and heavy where his finest work leapt nimbly. With Wendell Corey, Judith Anderson, and Gilbert Roland. —**DAVE KEHR** 109 min. 16mm archival print. Fri 6/7, 7 PM, and Sun 6/9, 1:30 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films

Hotel Imperial

The first and—by reports—best American film (1927) by the Swedish director Mauritz Stiller, a prolific filmmaker of the 20s who today, unfortunately, isn't remembered for his work as much as for his discovery of Greta Garbo. *Hotel Imperial*, a melodrama about a self-sacrificing chambermaid, was designed as a vehicle for Pola Negri. It remains the only opportunity Stiller had during his brief (and nearly fatal) stay in Hollywood to fully realize his remarkably delicate and detailed visual style. —**DAVE KEHR** 85 min. 35mm. Dennis Scott provides live accompaniment. Sat 6/8, 11:30 AM. Music Box

N I Am Mother

A mother's love is put to the test in *I Am Mother* in a setting we've seen many times before, a not-so-far-away dystopian future where robots are at war with humans. However, the film sets itself apart thanks mostly to its baby-faced star, Clara Rugaard, who gives an evocative performance as Daughter, a teenager raised by her robot Mother to repopulate the earth—a relationship that is soon put to the test. There's a shot where Rugaard stands alone aboard a spaceship that is instantly reminiscent of Sigourney Weaver in *Alien*, the movie

FILM



Sauvage/Wild

that launched Weaver's career in the same way *I Am Mother* ought to do for Rugaard's. Australian filmmaker Grant Sputore's direction keeps viewers on their toes, and we never quite know who to trust. The film would benefit from a more solid exposition of how this world came to be, and it drags on about 30 minutes too long, but overall *I Am Mother* serves as a strong addition to Netflix's original movie collection. —**NOËLLE D. LILLEY** 115 min. Streaming on Netflix

RR Pinocchio

Along with *Dumbo*, which immediately followed it, this 1940 classic, the second of the Disney animated features, is probably the best in terms of visual detail and overall imagination as well as narrative sweep. Like *Dumbo* and *Bambi*, it might have given cultural conservatives reason for concern by validating single parenthood, but everyone else should be delighted. The richly and finely delineated characters include a cluster of European villains, an American hero and blue fairy, and a couple of father figures whose nationalities seem mid-Atlantic. The moral lessons include a literalization of metaphors about lying and other forms of misbehaving, and the grasp of a little boy's emotions and behavior often borders on the uncanny. A razor-sharp restoration, with some stereo enhancement and vividly restored colors, appeared in 1992. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** 88 min. Sun 6/9, noon. Music Box

N Sauvage/Wild

The central thrust of this graphic French drama may be a radical notion to some: that a sex worker can enjoy the wild, carnal freedom his or her job can provide, while also being vulnerable to its dangers. This film, the first from writer-director Camille Vidal-Naquet, bubbles up from the plurality of emotions and experiences tied to sex work by focusing on one participant: a 22-year-old hustler (Félix Maritaud) who services a range of men on the outskirts of modern-day Strasbourg and, for the most part, has a good time doing it. His encounters stretch across the broad spectrum of human behavior, from tender to routine to vicious and terrifying. But through it all, Vidal-Naquet avoids what may have tempted lesser directors in handling the subject matter, such as judgment or cold, anthropological remove. Instead, she views her protagonist with compassion and respect, validating his desires while at the same time refusing to sugarcoat them. She has cited Agnès Varda's *Vagabond* as an inspiration, and it shows. The two women share a rare gift of being able to lyrically convey a nomadic life, which often includes romance, without romanticizing reality. In French with subtitles. —**LEAH PICKETT** 99 min. Fri 6/7, 6 PM; Sat 6/8, 8 PM; Sun 6/9, 3 PM; Mon 6/10, 6 and 8 PM; Wed 6/12, 8:15 PM; and Thu 6/13, 8 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

Sign o' the Times

Deftly and seamlessly integrating Prince's live performances in Antwerp and Rotterdam with thematically related interludes shot in his Minneapolis studio, this 1987 concert film starts fairly effectively and builds steadily from there. Leroy Bennett's lighting and production design and Peter Sinclair's cinematography both help to make this a rousing show, full of sound and fury and signifying plenty, but Prince remains the undisputed auteur. The rapid editing recalls the scattershot method of certain rock videos, but the cinematic and musical savvy with which this is done avoids the coitus interruptus of *The Cotton Club*: the overall spectacle is enhanced, not curtailed or compromised. Dancer Cat Glover and (especially) drummer Sheila E. shine in these razzle-dazzle surroundings; Dr. Fink (keyboards) and Atlanta Bliss (trumpet) play "Now's the Time" much too fast and still manage to swing; and Prince himself, passing through a spectrum of costumes and sexual roles, is never less than commanding, as performer, composer, and director. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** 85 min. Sun 6/9, 1 PM. Stony Island Arts Bank FREE

Stonewall Uprising

This documentary tells the story of the origin of the gay rights movement: during a routine 1969 police raid on a Mafia-owned gay bar in Greenwich Village, gays fought back in several days of street battles. A lengthy intro reminds us that when psychiatrists, instructional films, and network TV all identified homosexuals as mentally ill, being outed could mean losing one's job. Directors Kate Davis and David Heilbroner use dubious reenactments, and the testimony of participants and of the cop who led the raid ("It was terrifying," he recalls of being outnumbered). Some say that the revolt was initiated by black and Latino drag queens, a fact not presented here, but there are affecting moments: "We became a people," one man recalls. "All of a sudden I had brothers and sisters." —**FRED CAMPER** 80 min. Sat 6/8, 7 PM. Chicago Filmmakers

N Suburban Birds

This first feature by Chinese writer-director Qiu Sheng merits the term "promising," inspiring goodwill with its gentle tone and novel narrative form. The film promises more than it delivers, however: like many first-time filmmakers, Qiu is better at generating ideas than seeing them through to satisfying ends. The first half hour follows a group of surveyors in a rapidly developing suburb as they investigate sinkholes by day and leisurely get drunk at night. When one of the surveyors discovers a local schoolchild's abandoned diary, Qiu switches gears to present scenes from the kid's life, and the movie becomes an understated ode to the pleasures of childhood. All of this is surprisingly uncynical for a ➔

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8:00pm | **OPENING NIGHT RECEPTION**
9:00pm | **ALI'S COMEBACK: THE UNTOLD STORY - Q&A (USA)**

SAT, JUNE 22
5:30 pm **NO SHADE (UK)**
CENTERPIECE SCREENING
7:00pm | **CENTERPIECE RECEPTION**
8:00pm | **PARDONS OF INNOCENCE: THE WILMINGTON TEN - Q&A (USA)**

SUN, JUNE 23
6:30pm | **BLACK MEXICANS (Mexico)**

THU, JUNE 27
CLOSING NIGHT 7:30pm | **Closing Reception**
8:30pm | **MADE IN HIS IMAGE & THICKER THAN BLOOD (USA) - Q&A**

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➡ contemporary Chinese art movie; Qiu presents modernization and its attendant feelings of displacement as simply part of life, as opposed to a cause for anger or despair. He also elicits pleasingly sincere performances from both children and adults. In Mandarin with subtitles. —**BEN SACHS** *118 min. Facets Cinematheque*

The Suicide

Adapted from the Soviet play of the same name by Nikolay Erdman, this 1996 film from writer, director, and AIDS activist Gregg Bordowitz is a provocative comment on why a person might hide his or her complicated feelings in the wake of a revolution. Though the setting is Moscow in 1932, the story draws from Bordowitz's own struggles in the aftermath of the AIDS crisis that dominated the 1980s and early 1990s, during which he was an early participant in ACT UP and from which his early artistic work sprung. Here, the protagonist (Lothaire Bluteau) half-heartedly threatens suicide, only to find himself yanked in multiple directions: to be a symbol of optimism, a martyr, or a political pawn, depending on who wants what. "Life is wonderful, comrade!" a peer exclaims, with the attendant behest: "Don't think, comrade, work!" In fact, this absurdist satire is a rapierlike manifestation of Bordowitz's thinking, crackling with original wit, and it would serve the viewer well to pay close attention. In many ways, and especially in the darkening hours of late capitalism, not much has changed. Distributed by Video Data Bank and presented in collaboration with the Art Institute of Chicago's exhibition "Gregg Bordowitz: I Wanna Be Well." —**LEAH PICKETT** *88 min. Sat 6/8, 5:15 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center*

Taxi zum Klo (Taxi to the Loo)

Frank Ripplöh's funny and well-made autobiographical German feature (1980), about the wild nights and gray days of a gay schoolteacher in Berlin. Ripplöh, with his hangdog face and slinging gait, is a very appealing performer, and the film floats on his charm and happy sexual voraciousness. Fantasy elements (Ripplöh is never rejected) combine with documentary asides on the texture of gay life to make up an entertainingly varied series of anecdotes. The hard-core footage, shocking at first, performs the salutary function of demystifying gay sex for a straight audience, and the central theme—monogamy versus promiscuity—is certainly a universal one. The film is limited by its creeping misogyny and willful superficiality, yet its sheer freedom from guilt is infectious and uplifting. With Bernd Bräuer and Magdalena Montezuma. In German with subtitles. —**DAVE KEHR** *98 min. Fri 6/7, 7 PM. Chicago Filmmakers*

Trust

Hal Hartley's second feature (1990), a decided improvement over his first (*The Unbelievable Truth*), returns to the same turf (a Long Island commuter town) and features the same lead actress (Adrienne Shelly) as an alienated teenager. This time around, Shelly plays a high school student who finds herself pregnant, provokes her father's fatal heart attack, gets unceremoniously dumped by her boyfriend and kicked out of the house by her mother (Merritt Nelson), is assaulted, witnesses a kidnapping, and meets an angry and disgruntled electronics whiz (Martin Donovan) all in the same day. It's a credit to the film that this overflow of incident neither strains credibility nor becomes exploited for facile comedy; in fact the real story only begins once she and the electronics whiz become involved and their mutual adjustments (including the strains represented by their difficult parents) gradually transform both of them. Unpredictable while remaining honest to both



Suburban Birds

its characters and its milieu, this flaky comedy-drama improves as it proceeds; with John MacKay and Edie Falco. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** *107 min. 35mm. Mon 6/10, 7 PM. Music Box*

Vampyr

The greatness of Carl Dreyer's first sound film (1932, 83 min.) derives partly from its handling of the vampire theme in terms of sexuality and eroticism and partly from its highly distinctive, dreamy look, but it also has something to do with Dreyer's radical recasting of narrative form. Synopsizing the film not only betrays but misrepresents it: while never less than mesmerizing, it confounds conventions for establishing point of view and continuity, inventing a narrative language all its own. Some of the moods and images conveyed by this language are truly uncanny: the long voyage of a coffin, from the apparent viewpoint of the corpse inside; a dance of ghostly shadows inside a barn; a female vampire's expression of carnal desire for her fragile sister; an evil doctor's mysterious death by suffocation in a flour mill; a protracted dream sequence that manages to dovetail eerily into the narrative proper. The remarkable soundtrack, created entirely in a studio (in contrast to the images, which were all filmed on location), is an essential part of the film's voluptuous and haunting otherworldliness. (*Vampyr* was originally released by Dreyer in four separate versions—French, English, German, and Danish; most circulating prints now contain portions of two or three of these versions, although the dialogue is pretty sparse.) If you've never seen a Carl Dreyer film and wonder why many critics, myself included, regard him as possibly the greatest of all filmmakers, this chilling horror fantasy is the perfect place to begin to understand. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** *73 min. Kassi Cork and Daniel Evans provide live accompaniment. Outdoor screening. Wed 6/12, 8:30 PM. Comfort Station* [FREE](#)

ALSO PLAYING

Battle Royale

Set in the near future, Kinji Fukasaku's 2000 Japanese feature concerns a government plan to combat rising juvenile delinquency by kidnapping teenagers, sending them to a deserted island, arming them, and ordering them to kill one another, with the lone survivor returning to society. With Takeshi Kitano. In Japanese with subtitles. *114 min. Fri 6/7-Mon 6/10, 11 PM. Logan*

Bessho Tea Factory

Teiichi Hori directed this 2014 Japanese documentary about the growing and processing of tea in Osawa Village in the mountainous Shizuoka Prefecture. In Japanese with subtitles. *64 min. Showing as a double feature with Synchronizer (see separate listing). Sun 6/9, 7 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

Conspiracy Theorist

A screening of the prologue episode of a new locally-produced webseries, to be followed by a discussion to gauge feedback. *18 min. Mon 6/10, 7:30 PM. Comfort Station* [FREE](#)

DePaul Premiere Film Festival

A showcase of student films from DePaul's School of Cinematic Arts. *Fri 6/7, 6 PM. Music Box*

Gloria Bell

A fiftysomething woman in LA enjoys life and looks for love in the city's dance clubs. Sebastián Lelio directed. With Julianne Moore, John Turturro, Michael Cera, Caren Pistorius, Brad Garrett, Jeanne Tripplehorn, and Rita Wilson. *R, 102 min. Sat 6/8, 7 and 9:30 PM; and Sun 6/9, 4 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

Halston

A documentary about the iconic fashion designer. Frédéric Tcheng directed. *105 min. Music Box*

Hastrman

A strange nobleman returns to his ancestral home in this Czech gothic tale set in 19th-century Bohemia. Ondrej Havelka directed. In Czech with subtitles. *100 min. Fri 6/7, 7:45 PM, and Thu 6/13, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center*

The Last Black Man in San Francisco

Jimmie Fails stars in and cowrote this dramatization of his own experiences trying to regain ownership of the house his grandfather built in a rapidly changing San Francisco. Joe Talbot directed. *R, 120 min. Fails and Talbot attend this advance screening. RSVP required: blockmuseum.northwestern.edu. Tue 6/11, 7 PM. Northwestern University Block Museum of Art* [FREE](#)

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NU Docs Program 1: Retrospectives

A screening of documentary shorts by students in Northwestern's MFA program, with work by Agustín Donoso, Molly Wagener, Jung Ah Kim, and Benjamin Buxton. *69 min. The filmmakers attend the screening. Preceded by a reception at 6:15 PM. Wed 6/12, 7 PM. Northwestern University Block Museum of Art* [FREE](#)

NU Docs Program 2: Temporalities

A screening of documentary shorts by students in Northwestern's MFA program, with work by Cami Guarda, Naeema Jamilah Torres, Natasha Nair, and Jennifer Boles. *56 min. The filmmakers attend the screening. Preceded by a reception at 6:15 PM. Thu 6/13, 7 PM. Northwestern University Block Museum of Art* [FREE](#)

Pavarotti

Ron Howard directed this documentary about famed opera singer Luciano Pavarotti. *AMC River East, Century 12 and CineArts 6*

Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story by Martin Scorsese

Martin Scorsese directed this documentary that looks back at Bob Dylan and the American zeitgeist in 1975. *142 min. Tue 6/11, 6:30 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center*

The Secret Life of Pets 2

A sequel to the 2016 animated film about the continuing adventures of a group of pets. Chris Renaud and Jonathan del Val directed. With voice work by Patton Oswalt, Eric Stonestreet, Kevin Hart, Jenny Slate, Ellie Kemper, Tiffany Haddish, Lake Bell, Dana Carvey, Hannibal Buress, and Harrison Ford. *PG, ArcLight, Century 12 and CineArts 6, Chatham 14, Cicero Showplace 14, City North 14, Ford City, Lake Theatre, IMAX, River East 21, Showplace 14, Galewood Crossings, 600 N. Michigan, Webster Place 11*

Synchronizer

Kunitoshi Manda directed this 2017 Japanese thriller about a scientist studying brain waves. In Japanese with subtitles. *83 min. Showing as a double feature with Bessho Tea Factory (see separate listing). Sun 6/9, 7 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

Under The Silver Lake

David Robert Mitchell directed this crime mystery about a man searching Los Angeles for a woman who's disappeared. *R, 139 min. Fri 6/7, 9:30 PM; Sat 6/8, 1:30 and 9:30 PM; Sun 6/8, 7:30 PM; Mon 6/10, 9:30 PM; Tue 6/11, 4:15 and 9:30 PM; and Wed 6/12 and Thu 6/13, 4:15 PM. Music Box*

We Are Thankful

A South African documentary about a young man who wants to become an actor. Joshua Magor directed. In Zulu with subtitles. *94 min. Wed 6/12, 6:30 PM. Chicago Cultural Center* [FREE](#)

Winter Flies

Olmo Omerzu directed this Czech/Slovak coming-of-age film about two teens on a road trip in a stolen car. In Czech with subtitles. *85 min. Sun 6/9, 5 PM, and Wed 6/12, 8 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center* [R](#)



Bobby Rush, pictured here at the 2007 Blues Festival, performs Friday at Jay Pritzker Pavilion.

© MICHAEL JACKSON

CHICAGO BLUES FESTIVAL

Fri 6/7 through Sun 6/9, 11 AM-9 PM, Millennium Park, Michigan and Randolph, free, all ages

The Reader's guide to the 2019 CHICAGO BLUES FESTIVAL

The fest diversifies its lineup for its third year in Millennium Park, with suave and sexy R&B star Latimore, deep-soul legend Don Bryant, genre-defying singer Bettye LaVette, and many more.

By **BILL DAHL AND DAVID WHITEIS**

The Chicago Blues Festival has tried to expand its scope this year to include a wider spectrum of artists and genres—and I can say that with some confidence, since for the first time in decades I served on the volunteer committee that helps book the fest. The lineup includes several aggressively contemporary acts, including incendiary young guitarist-vocalist Melody Angel and southern soul-blues artists Karen Wolfe and O.B. Buchana. Guitarist Benny Turner makes his Blues Festival debut this year, building on the legacy of his brother, the late Freddie King; so does Nigerian singer-songwriter and guitarist Bombino, who exemplifies the complex, long-standing cultural exchange between American blues and African music. On Sunday evening, Ruthie Foster closes out the festivities with her eclectic blend of folk roots and modern blues and soul.

Of course, the usual array of old-schoolers is on hand too—the Blues Festival is nothing if not respectful of tradition. They include several Chicago veterans—harpist Billy Boy Arnold, guitarist Jimmy Johnson, singer Mary Lane, and boogie-woogie piano master Erwin Helfer—as well as deep-soul legend Don Bryant, eclectic soul stylist Bettye LaVette, the perennially suave and sexy Benny Latimore, and funk

folklorist Bobby Rush, with his dancing girls and raunchily funny dispatches from the front lines of sex and love. As always, though, your best bet is to explore. Chicago singer Mzz Reese is richly deserving of wider recognition, for example, and Detroit's Thornetta Davis is legendary in her hometown but too often overlooked outside it. They both demonstrate one of the best things about Blues Fest: if you're willing to search, you can always find plenty of unexpected gems, rough-cut and otherwise.

As it has been since 2017, the festival is held in Millennium Park. The Crossroads Stage, featuring local and national acts, is on the South promenade, southeast of the *Cloud Gate* sculpture ("the Bean"). The Juke Joint Stage, oriented toward southern artists, is on the North promenade, northeast of *Cloud Gate*. The Front Porch Stage is at Wrigley Square (at the park's northwest corner, near the intersection of Randolph and Michigan) and overlooks the area where nonprofit organizations set up their tents. The Rosa's Lounge booth, located adjacent to the Bean, and the Park Grill Stage, which is of course near the Park Grill, will both host music as well. All events are free. —**DAVID WHITEIS**

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SATURDAY, JUNE 15 8PM

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SHAM REDMOND

KAREN WOLFE
Fri 6/7, 1:45 PM,
Juke Joint Stage

KAREN WOLFE sings tough but supple southern soul-blues

This Memphis vocalist has adopted the persona of a vintage blueswoman—feisty, independent, and ready to call out no-good men.

By DAVID WHITEIS

Memphis-based vocalist Karen Wolfe got her start in the mid-90s singing backup for her sister-in-law, the late Denise LaSalle. Encouraged by LaSalle to go out on her own, she released her debut album, *First Time Out* (B&J), in 2006; it pairs her sweet, supple vo-

cals with the usual synth-heavy southern soul-blues backing—the same sound, more or less, that’s characterized her studio output ever since. But from the beginning Wolfe has made it a point to recruit the finest sidemen available for her live performances, allowing her to spark her shows with an energy and sensual grace that her recordings didn’t always reflect. (Canned-sounding recordings are a common problem for modern southern-soul vocalists, and probably a main reason the genre hasn’t found wider acceptance among mainstream blues fans.)

Wolfe’s vocals have toughened over the years, and in another expression of LaSalle’s ongoing influence, she’s adopted a vintage blueswoman’s persona—feisty and independent, and just as ready to call out no-good men (“Grown Ass Man,” “Man Enough”) or throw down to perfidious women (“That Bitch Ain’t Me”) as she is to declare her sexual autonomy (“B.O.B.,” which stands for “Battery Operated Boyfriend”). Wolfe’s current band includes members of Blak Ice, LaSalle’s last working unit, and she appears at Blues Fest on the same stage LaSalle graced in 2017 for one of her final shows—so this set will undoubtedly be charged with bittersweet emotion.



TATYANA YOUNG

MZZ REESE and her Reese’s Pieces serve up crowd-pleasing blues

Whether on well-chosen covers or her signature song “Cookies,” she prefers nuance and subtlety to pyrotechnics.

By DAVID WHITEIS

The neighborhood clubs of Chicago’s south and west sides aren’t the incubators of blues talent that they used to be, but some artists on that circuit still have the potential to break out and establish themselves among a more general audience. One is vocalist Mzz Reese, a sultry alto who cites Denise LaSalle as her primary inspiration. Reese’s “Cookies,” a sexual throwdown in the LaSalle mode (“If you don’t treat my cookies right / I’ll be dippin’ someone else’s milk”), shares its title with her self-released 2015 debut album, and it’s already become her signature song.

Nonetheless, audiences in the clubs Reese usually works tend to prefer covers of well-known standards, so that’s what she gives them. To her credit, when she chooses tunes—the Pointer Sisters’ “Fire,” Gwen McCrae’s “Rockin’ Chair”—she does her best to find some that haven’t been overdone, mixing them in with guaranteed crowd-pleasers (“I Can’t Stand the Rain,” for instance, as well as the offerings from LaSalle’s songbook

she includes in most of her shows). She’s a straightforward stylist, preferring nuance and subtlety to pyrotechnics, but she sings

MZZ REESE
Fri 6/7, 5 PM, Front Porch Stage

MZZ REESE
Fri 6/7, 9 PM, Dr. J’s Place, 3421
W. Chicago, free, 21+

MALINA MOYE, MZZ REESE
Sat 6/29, 9:30 PM, Buddy Guy’s
Legends, 700 S. Wabash, \$20,
21+

everything with a fervor that no doubt draws on her gospel background.

Reese has recently assembled her strongest and most versatile band yet, dubbed Reese’s Pieces, and over the past year or so they’ve become a regular attraction at Buddy Guy’s Legends, among other upscale venues. And in today’s musical marketplace, that’s an encouraging sign for their future.

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BILLY BOY ARNOLD helped the blues give birth to rock 'n' roll

He might be best known as Bo Diddley's 1950s harmonica player, but he's 25 years into a comeback of his own.

By DAVID WHITEIS

Billy Boy Arnold's career spans no fewer than three historical blues epochs. Mentored as a teenager in 1948 by harmonica master John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson, who'd helped define the mid-20th-century Chicago style, Arnold began playing professionally just as Muddy Waters and his contemporaries kicked off the postwar blues insurgency. Then, in 1955, he participat-

ed in what was, for all intents and purposes, the birth of rock 'n' roll—in fact, he's often credited with coining one of rock's most iconic stage names.

Born in Chicago in 1935, William Arnold grew up idolizing Williamson and other midcentury bluesmen, many of them associated with Chicago label Bluebird. They were developing an urbanized update of the

sparse acoustic blues still prevalent in the south—and Williamson, who'd revolutionized the blues harmonica by transforming it into a lead instrument roughly analogous to the saxophone in jazz, was one of the luminaries of this new sound.

Arnold got the chance to meet his idol for a memorable tutoring session only a few weeks before Williamson was murdered while walking home from a gig. Inspired, Arnold hit the

**CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE WITH
SPECIAL GUEST BILLY BOY ARNOLD**
Fri 6/7, 5 PM, Jay Pritzker Pavilion

BILLY BOY ARNOLD
Sat 6/8, 3 PM, Crossroads Stage

local circuit, and in 1953 he released his own debut, the single "I Ain't Got No Money" b/w "Hello Stranger," on the tiny, short-lived Chicago label Cool—but these straightforward 12-bar blues outings barely hinted at what was to come.

Within a year or so, Arnold began working with a bold young singer-guitarist named Elvis McDaniel, who was busking on the south and west sides with guitarist Jody Williams and washtub player Roosevelt Jackson in a group called the Langley Avenue Jive Cats. In 1955, McDaniel and his band, now augmented by Jerome Green on maracas, auditioned a raunchy blues with a propulsive, off-center beat for several local labels, finally ending up at Chess Records. They'd been calling the song "Hey Noxema" or "Uncle John," but under Leonard Chess's direction, they cleaned up the lyrics and changed its title to "Bo Diddley"—which almost immediately became McDaniel's stage name. (Several sources, including Arnold himself, say that he was the one who suggested it.) The flip side, "I'm a Man," featured Billy Boy's harmonica atop a lurching, testosterone-

driven stop-time cadence. These young African American urbanites were thrusting their manhood aggressively in the face of Eisenhower-era America, and pop culture would never be the same.

Arnold also appeared on Bo Diddley's "She's Fine, She's Mine" later that year, but by then he'd signed with Vee-Jay, which released a series of his singles between 1955 and 1957. These discs, along with the Diddley sides, form the basis of his renown among collectors. Two of his Vee-Jay songs—"I Ain't Got You" and "I Wish You Would," both cut in 1955—eventually earned Arnold some "mainstream" (read "white") recognition when the Yardbirds resurrected them on their 1965 LP *For Your Love*. For the next few decades, though, Arnold hovered in "living legend" limbo—idolized by collectors and greeted as a conquering hero when he could perform overseas, but otherwise virtually ignored.

Finally, in 1993, Arnold launched a state-side comeback with the album *Back Where I Belong* (Alligator). He's continued to record since then—his most recent release is 2014's *The Blues Soul of Billy Boy Arnold* (Stony Plain)—and he's been intermittently active as a live performer. For the 2009 anthology *Chicago Blues: A Living History* (Raisin' Music) he contributed his own "I Wish You Would" along with covers of songs by Williamson, Tampa Red, Memphis Slim, and another of his early role models, Big Bill Broonzy. In 2012, he dug into those roots again for the Electro-Fi release *Billy Boy Arnold Sings Big Bill Broonzy*.

Even though Arnold's 1950s discography could be considered modest—not quite 20 sides, none of which charted—those early recordings provide a tantalizing snapshot of a music in the throes of radical if not cataclysmic change. Now that this change is a matter of history, Billy Boy Arnold is universally feted as a carrier of living blues heritage who helped the blues and R&B give birth to rock 'n' roll. **R**



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SCHUBAS TAVERN

If you see one set this Blues Festival, make it JIMMY JOHNSON

At 90 years old, the guitarist is a walking master class in modern blues greatness.

By DAVID WHITEIS

Jimmy Johnson's keening tenor voice and supple, emotionally intense guitar lines are considered something of a miracle among blues lovers these days, emanating as they do from a man born more than 90 years ago in Holly Springs, Mississippi. Johnson's 60-plus-year career has taken him from hard-scrabble urban juke joints to nightclubs, concert

halls, and festivals around the world, and his influences include gospel, doo-wop, and deep soul as well as country music, jazz, and of course the venerable Delta-Memphis-Chicago blues lineage.

Johnson's birth name was James Thompson, but he changed it after his brother Syl began recording in 1959 as "Syl Johnson." He



The blues "revival" among white aficionados that began in the 1960s inspired Johnson to shift focus and forge a new identity as a bluesman. The irony was inescapable: this new white audience was embracing him as "authentic" for playing music that he hadn't played for Black folks in decades, if ever (and that a lot of younger Black listeners would likely have derided as passe by then). Nonetheless, Johnson adapted with aplomb, gigging around the burgeoning north-side circuit, embarking on extensive tours, playing festivals in the U.S. and overseas, and recording some of modern blues' most acclaimed albums for such labels as Alligator, Delmark, Wolf, and Black & Blue—a legacy that has continued into the new millennium.

Through it all, Johnson has refused to pander, continuing to incorporate the diverse styles and influences he's absorbed over the decades. His vocals, intense and emotive yet leavened with an almost milky sweetness, blend rawness and urbanity; his lyrics reflect a keen-minded modernist sensibility, both in his own compositions and in his reworkings of others' hits (he used to emphasize the time-

sang in church as a boy and also found inspiration at school, where he'd sneak into the gym during lunch breaks and work out on a piano stored there. Inspired by his schoolmate Matt Murphy, who would become one of the most esteemed fretmen in blues, he began noodling around on the guitar, and after moving to Chicago when he was about 19, he acquired a new instrument from Billy Boy Arnold and honed his chops further. He remembers his early musical role models as including jazz masters Grant Green and Kenny Burrell and forward-minded Chicago bluesmen Otis Rush and Magic Sam.

By the early 1960s, Johnson was leading his own band. It wasn't a blues band, per se: club audiences demanded entertainers with diverse, crowd-pleasing repertoires, and with his longtime admiration for jazz and pop, Johnson found it easy to accommodate them. He was also among the first African American bandleaders in Chicago to play white clubs, expanding even further to include pop fare such as "Hang On Sloopy" (his band, the Sparks, featured his old friend Matt Murphy on guitar and Singing Sam Chatmon on vocals). When he got the opportunity to record under his own name in 1968, he worked up a driving, funk-blues instrumental that the Stuff label released as "Get It" b/w "Work Your Thing," credited to Jimmie Johnson & the Lucky Hearts. Neither that record nor its follow-ups had much success, though, and for the next few years Johnson focused increasingly on sideman work, backing the likes of Bobby Rush, Denise LaSalle, Tyrone Davis, Ruby Andrews, and Otis Clay.

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TERRY O'HAGAN

MELODY ANGEL is the future of the blues

This Chicago musician and actress blends blues, old-school rock 'n' roll, R&B, hip-hop, and more to create a style all her own.

By DAVID WHITEIS

At her best, young Chicago singer-guitarist Melody Angel comes on like a one-woman Black Rock Coalition. She updates ideas drawn from blues and old-school rock 'n' roll with a hard-rock ferocity that never crosses into overkill, while also incorporating generous helpings of R&B, hip-hop, and Tracy Chapman-esque balladry into her style.

Angel's emotional range is both wide and deep, intensified by the socially conscious sensibility of her lyrics. She inhabits her politically charged vignettes of struggle and survival as one who's lived them, compelling her listeners to experience them the same way, with no room for liberal bromides or ironic detachment ("How dare you judge me / In your glass house," she proclaims in "Cease Fire," on her 2016 album *In This America*). But she won't give in to cynicism or despair: as she sings in "Rebel," from the same record, "I got the looks, I got the clothes, I got the sex appeal. . . . I'm a rebel with a cause and it feels so good!"

Recently, Angel has expanded her artistic activities to include both theater and film. In

2018, she appeared in Suzan-Lori Parks's *Father Comes Home From the Wars* at the Goodman Theatre, and this year she played one of the leads in Court Theatre's production of Ntozake Shange's award-winning *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf*. Also in 2018, she starred in the independently produced film *Knockout*, the story of a young African American woman who faces down her family's disapproval of her passion for boxing. The film, which concluded with a searing rendition of Angel's blues-rock

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Sat 6/8, 11 AM, Crossroads Stage

MELODY ANGEL BAND
Sun 6/9, 9 PM, Rosa's Lounge,
3420 W. Armitage, \$15, 21+

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MELODY ANGEL: A WOMAN'S
BLUES**
Thu 6/13, 8:30 PM, Rosa's Lounge,
3420 W. Armitage, \$10, 21+

anthem "Always on Me," was named Best Picture at Chicago's 14th annual 48 Hour Film Project. Angel's performance earned her Best Lead Actress recognition at the 2018 Filmopalooza competition in Orlando. In May, *Knockout* was screened at the Cannes Film Festival.

If the blues is to survive and grow as a contemporary African American art form, artists like Melody Angel will make it happen. **A**



O.B. BUCHANA
Sat 6/8, 3 PM,
Juke Joint Stage

COURTESY ECKO RECORDS

O.B. BUCHANA sings about sin with the voice of a saint

This soul-blues superstar brings a distinctive grit to his tales of all-night escapades.

By DAVID WHITEIS

O.B. Buchana has yet to establish much of a name up north, but he's one of the leading lights of soul-blues, also called southern soul—a genre that thrives on a circuit that's still mostly regional and somewhat isolated. His voice is thick and gritty, and he favors bouncy, good-timey paeans to all-night juking and double entendre-laden odes to sexual prowess (both his own and his partners'), leavened by the occasional steamy boudoir ballad. It's the kind of thing that some older-school blues and deep-soul aficionados find irredeemably arch, if not downright puerile, but that hard-core fans of the genre never seem to tire of.

Born in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, and raised in nearby Clarksdale, Buchana got his start singing gospel. He began recording sec-

ular music in the early 1990s, and his career really took off after he signed with Memphis-based Ecko Records and released *Shake What You Got!* in 2004. Since then, his party anthems and patented wink-wink-nudge tales of bedroom high jinks have propelled him to the closest thing there is to superstardom in the southern-soul world.

It's Buchana's voice that redeems him. Even though his lyrics (and sometimes his stage show) might seem better suited to a junior high school locker room than a juke joint, his deep-throated, emotionally resonant singing keeps him grounded in what admirers of the style continue to extol as "grown folks' music." That marks him out—sometimes, it seems, almost in spite of himself—as a true soul man. **A**

LATIMORE proves himself a smooth soul-blues survivor

He outlasted disco decades ago, and on his most recent album he applies his inimitable voice to the Great American Songbook.

By **BILL DAHL**

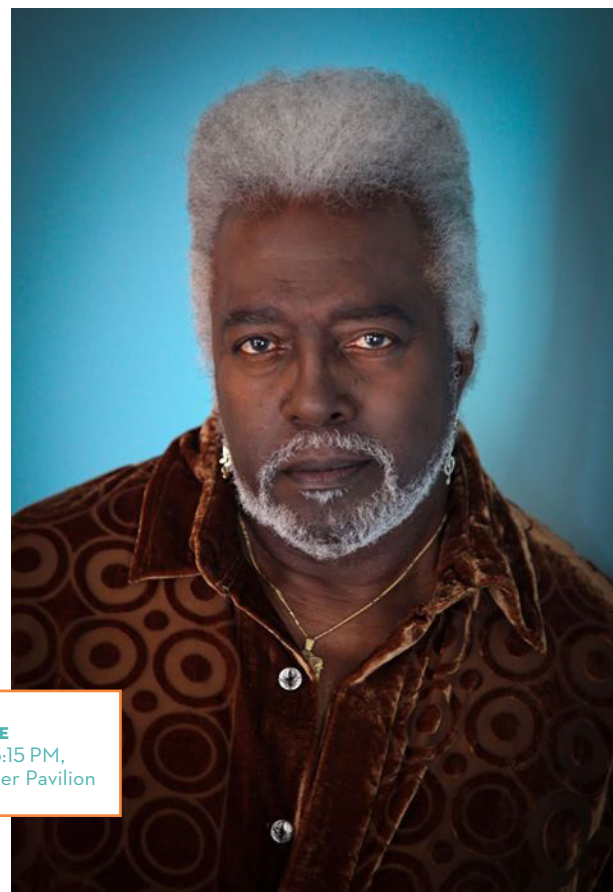
In the 1970s, KC & the Sunshine Band and George McCrae recorded in Miami, but the bustling hit factory that launched them produced more than disco stars—it also gave the world Latimore, the sensuous soul-blues singer who broke out with a swinging cover of the blues classic “Stormy Monday” and followed it with a sultry, slow-simmering ballad of his own, the 1974 R&B chart topper “Let’s Straighten It Out.”

Ever since then, he’s had one leg in the blues and the other in southern soul—not that it’s hurt him commercially. “After all this time that I’ve been out here, it’s difficult to categorize me a lot of times, because some people think, ‘Well, he’s not bluesy enough,’” says

Latimore. “And then somebody from the other side will say, ‘Well, he’s too bluesy!’ But see, I was born and raised up in the blues.”

That was in Charleston, Tennessee, where a young Benny Latimore sang in his church choir. He later dropped out of college after he snagged a gig singing with Louis Brooks’s R&B combo in Nashville. On that job he began doubling on piano. “I never had the training, but I played by ear,” Latimore says. “We always had a piano at our house, and I fooled around with it.” That put him in excellent position to join the band of deep-voiced Nashville R&B crooner Joe Henderson, who’d just scored a hit in 1962 with “Snap Your Fingers.”

When that work dried up, Latimore took a



LATIMORE
Sat 6/8, 5:15 PM,
Jay Pritzker Pavilion

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Miami club owner up on his offer of a nightclub residency and settled down—he’s lived in Florida ever since. He began recording for producer Henry Stone in 1966, including plenty of session work—he played keyboards on blockbusters such as Betty Wright’s “Clean Up Woman” and Gwen McCrae’s “Rockin’ Chair.”

National hits initially proved elusive, but in late 1973 Latimore had his first big success as a vocalist (dispensing with his last name) with his out-of-left-field remake of “Stormy Monday” for Stone’s Glades label. Chicago disc jockey E. Rodney Jones, program director at WVON radio, played a major role in making a national hit out of what was originally intended to be an album track.

“I guess he just put it on to listen himself, and he liked it. And he said, ‘I’m going to put this on the air!’ He put it on the air, and his board lit up,” says Latimore. “He called Henry Stone and said, ‘Henry, that “Stormy Monday,” that’s the record right there! You need to put that out as a single!’ So he put that out as a single, and it just went crazy in Chicago.”

A few months later, “Let’s Straighten It Out” rendered Latimore a full-fledged R&B luminary. “A lot of things inspired it. Some of my own personal experiences, and some vicarious experiences,” he says. “I’ve learned to listen to a lot of people, listen to what they think about

this or that or the other. I don’t know, I guess I’m one of these people that people talk to. And they tell me about problems that they’re having. Sometimes their personal problems.”

After that, hits came in abundance for Latimore for the rest of the 70s, notably “Keep the Home Fire Burnin’” in 1975 and “Somethin’ Bout ’Cha” the following year. He even dared to poke a little wry fun at Stone’s principal stock-in-trade with his ’79 hit “Discoed to Death.” “In clubs where we used to gig every night, you had a guy in there playing records every night,” he remembers. “They were playing disco, disco, disco, disco.”

Disco died, but Latimore persevered—even after Stone’s empire bit the dust in the early 80s. He remains open to stylistic experimentation. On his 2017 album, *A Taste of Me: Great American Songs* (Essential Media), the keyboardist caresses venerable chestnuts from several generations of the Great American Songbook, among them “Smile,” “The Very Thought of You,” “Cry Me a River,” and “You Are So Beautiful”—and no matter the material, his pipes display the same velvet-lined contours he’s long brought to his blues and soul excursions.

“I still enjoy it,” says Latimore. “Every time I get on the stage, it was something that I was meant to do. I guess that’s why I still do it.”



Memphis veteran DON BRYANT returns to soul after decades away

He narrowly missed stardom at Hi Records in the 60s, and now he's taking another swing.

By BILL DAHL

Stardom may well be sweeter the second time around for soul singer Don Bryant. In the early 1960s, the Memphis native was a featured vocalist for bandleader Willie Mitchell, who produced him at Hi Records long before Al Green, Otis Clay, and Syl Johnson found their way to the label.

Then in 1968 soul chanteuse Ann Peebles, one of Mitchell's new signings, entered Bryant's life. For the most part, he placed his singing career on hold during the early 70s to concentrate on songwriting—and on helping the woman who'd soon be his wife achieve stardom (they married in 1974). "When she exploded, that was it," says Bryant. "It seemed like, 'Don, you sit right here, and we'll get back to you in a minute.'"

Happily, Bryant wasn't through with singing R&B for good—though for nearly half a century he made no secular recordings at all, instead focusing on gospel music. Bryant's widely acclaimed 2017 comeback album, *Don't*

Give Up on Love (Fat Possum), re-created the surging Hi sound with a contemporary sheen, thanks in no small part to skintight backing by Memphis band the Bo-Keys. Bryant was convinced to give it another serious try behind the

DON BRYANT
Sat 6/8, 6:30,
Jay Pritzker Pavilion

microphone by two members of the Bo-Keys: bassist Scott Bomar, the album's coproducer, and drummer Howard "Bulldog" Grimes, an anchor of Hi's legendary 60s and 70s rhythm section.

"Scott talked to me about it, but I wasn't really that interested in it," Bryant recalls. "He finally asked me if I would do some live shows with him. And then I decided that I was going to do it. So I started doing the live shows

with him, and he got more and more into me recording an album. I didn't know whether or not it was there. But I decided I was going to try it and see, if they were that interested in doing it. And I'm glad I did.

"I thought to myself, possibly there are a lot more people out there like me. They want to hear that real old-school R&B," he says. "That was one of the things that kind of urged me on."

Bryant's rich, melismatic vocals are an outgrowth of his sanctified upbringing. He was born in Memphis in 1942 and began singing in church at age five. He soon joined his father's gospel group, but in high school he was bitten by the doo-wop bug. While still a teenager he joined the Four Canes, who became the Four Kings and began gigging with Mitchell's band. They debuted on wax in 1959 (with Mitchell top billed), then moved with Mitchell to Hi in '63. But Bryant wasn't fated to remain an anonymous group member for long. He went solo at Hi in 1965, cutting a series of splendid Memphis soul singles that should've made him a national star.

"Willie and them was picking a lot of the material for me then," Bryant says. "Things that they thought I'd be good at doing or what have you. And I was leaning to his judgment." A cover-loaded 1969 album, *Precious Soul*, came and went without doing much for his career.

After Mitchell signed Peebles to Hi, Bryant's songwriting skills served her well. He wrote one of her early signature songs, 1971's "99 Lbs.," and they collaborated on the 1973 classic "I Can't Stand the Rain," whose genesis was surprisingly literal.

"We were supposed to go to a show that night. I think it was Bobby 'Blue' Bland," Bryant remembers. "When it started raining, we knew we were not going to be able to make it to that show. And that's how the comment came of, 'Oh, I can't stand this rain!' Everybody was peeping out the window, and it was pouring down. Instead of being sad about it, somebody said, 'Hey, that sounds like a title for a song!'"

Bryant traveled with his wife, singing back-up, until a 2012 stroke sidelined her. Now it's his turn to command the spotlight again. "It is the first time I've done it without Willie," Bryant says. "Sometimes before you go out on the stage, you have butterflies: 'Am I going to do it right? Am I going to sound right?' But at the last minute, all you can do is do what you do.

"I'm not going to question it," he says of this new round of fame. "I'm going to enjoy it." **R**

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CHICAGO BLUES FESTIVAL



© MARK SELIGER

BETTYE LAVETTE can make any song sound like it was written for her

She debuted with a hit soul single in 1962, but she's long since transcended genre, singing blues, country, pop, funk, rock, and more.

By **BILL DAHL**

Bettye LaVette had her first brush with stardom as a sassy teenage soul singer in the early 1960s, but she's long since transcended genre—she's now a magnificent vocalist who can make seemingly any song sound as though it were written specifically for her.

A longtime Detroitier, LaVette signed to Motown in the early 80s, but only briefly—in fact, for much of her career her successes have been halting. She finally broke through to the mainstream with the 2005 album *I've Got My Own Hell to Raise*, where she sang material by the likes of Aimee Mann, Fiona Apple, Dolly Parton, and Sinéad O'Connor (LaVette often delivers O'Connor's "I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got" a cappella as an encore). Her next two full-lengths, 2007's *The Scene of the Crime* (recorded in Muscle Shoals with southern rockers Drive-By Truckers) and 2010's *Interpretations: The British Rock Songbook* (featuring covers of Led Zeppelin, the Who, and the Rolling Stones, among others) were likewise a long way from the straight-ahead R&B with

which she'd broken into the business.

"I think that somewhere along the line, the fact that I'm a singer and a song interpreter got lost. I have always done so many different kinds of music," says LaVette. "My first manager wanted me to be a broad singer. He told me early on, 'You may never be a star, but if you will learn how to sing a lot of good songs and sing them well, you can work until you die.'"

Last year LaVette released the Bob Dylan tribute album *Things Have Changed*, exploring Dylan's deep catalog—and her performance at the Old Town School of Folk Music revealed hidden nuances in his lyrics, despite their myriad twists and turns. "I'm old and I can't remember all the damn words," she says, laughing. "There was one song I took maybe three verses out of it, and I still had four!"

When LaVette became an overnight sensation in 1962, at age 16, she was singing someone else's material. She'd met singer and producer Timmy Shaw at a show at Detroit's Graystone Ballroom, and he introduced her to

his business and songwriting partner, Johnnie Mae Matthews. "I was there to try and be close to the singers," LaVette says. "But I didn't think anyone would say 'Here—you can sing too!'"

Despite LaVette's total lack of professional experience (she sang along with her parents' jukebox in Muskegon, Michigan, as a toddler), Shaw and Matthews handed her their driving tune "My Man—He's a Lovin' Man" and told her to learn it. "I met them on a Sunday, and we recorded it the next Sunday," she says. "It was out the next Friday." The single was released by Atlantic Records, and LaVette had a national R&B hit her first time on wax.

When her next single flopped, LaVette went to New York and audaciously demanded that Atlantic honcho Jerry Wexler release her from her contract. "Leaving Atlantic when I was 16 is still the most stupid thing I've ever done in my career," she admits. But LaVette rebounded. While living for a time in New York, she hit again in 1965 with the moving soul ballad "Let Me Down Easy," for the Calla label. Its success got her on the network TV program *Shindig!* that same year.

LaVette returned to the R&B charts in 1969 with a soulful rendition of the slightly salacious country tune "He Made a Woman Out of Me" that she'd cut in Memphis. But bad luck dogged the singer. What should've been her triumphant debut album, made in Muscle Shoals in 1972 and loaded with potential hits, was shelved without explanation by Atco Records (a division of Atlantic). "If I was acting and I needed to make tears come, all I'd have to do is dwell on that," LaVette says.

At the Blues Festival, LaVette and her current band will play a set spanning her entire career—perhaps she'll even do something from that shelved record. "I'll be doing some of what's going on now, some of what has gone

BETTYE LAVETTE
Sat 6/8, 7:45 PM,
Jay Pritzker Pavilion

on, and some of that that happened at the Regal Theater there in Chicago that nobody else knows about," she says. "I'm trying to let people know that I didn't happen by osmosis!"

LaVette has made an indelible mark on music, and she's done it entirely her own way, rough patches and all. "I thought I would die obscure and broke," she says. "Now I'm just going to die broke. But everybody knows who I am!" **R**



Jamiah Rogers
performs Sunday
at River Roast.
📷 JOHN "NUNU" ZUMOT

Thinking outside the park

The Blues Festival spurs dozens of special events around town, including shows by Jamiah Rogers, Lurrie Bell, and Lynne Jordan—plus three historic photo exhibits.

By DAVID WHITEIS

Time was when the weeks leading up to the Chicago Blues Festival were nearly another festival in themselves. Those days are gone, but the city's blues clubs will still be jumping all weekend. Underpublicized neighborhood joints will throw shows worth noting too, and museums, libraries, and non-profits will host special events.

The latter include the Chicago History Museum's "Amplified: Chicago Blues" exhibit, which runs through August 10 and features the work of photographer Raeburn Flerlage, as well as "The Rolling Stones at Chess," an exhibit of rarely seen Bob Bonis photos of the Stones' 1964 recording session at Chess, which runs June 5 through June 29 at the Blues Heaven Foundation (housed in the iconic Chess Records building). "Unsung Bronzeville: A Musical History Exhibition," presented by the

Chicago Blues Museum at Harold Washington College through the end of the month, includes rare images from some of Bronzeville's most legendary venues and events of the 50s, 60s, and 70s, including the famous night at the Regal when WVON DJs Pervis Spann and E. Rodney Jones crowned Aretha Franklin the "Queen of Soul."

Thursday's shows include the Chicago Blues Camp's "graduation recital" at Rosa's Lounge, which caps a weeklong educational program conducted by some of the city's premier blues artists (some of whom appear at this year's festival). Meanwhile, veteran club MC the Legendary Godfather hosts the South Side Blues Revue at the Ambrosia Room, attached to a resale shop called Another Man's Treasure.

On Friday, Mzz Reese headlines at Dr. J's Place, fresh from her Blues Festival debut,

while the Odyssey East presents the Source One Band, led by bassist Joe Pratt and guitarist Sir Walter Scott and featuring vocalist New Orleans Beau. At Motor Row Brewing, Doc Payne (son of legendary drummer Odie Payne) holds forth with his Payne Relief Smooth Blues Band. And in case you need a break from the Millennium Park hubbub during the day, Chicago State University presents a discussion led by "cultural geographer" Tim Cresswell about his book *Maxwell Street: Capturing the Essence of a Remembered/Forgotten Place*, devoted to Chicago's bygone Sunday-morning flea market and informal open-air blues festival.

On Saturday, After-Words Books sponsors a "Jazz, Blues, and Beyond Bus Tour" of musical landmarks famous and obscure. On Sunday, worthwhile shows include a performance by blues prodigy Jamiah Rogers at River Roast, the redoubtable Jimmy Johnson doing his regular gig at the Lagunitas taproom, and a Blues Fest satellite show (with Vince "Lefty" Johnson, David Herrero, and others) at what's still being called the Maxwell Street Market but is actually several blocks east. In case you'll still be around Monday, the Fantastic L'Roy appears at Linda's Place that night.

As always, call ahead if you can to make sure a show is really happening.

THURSDAY 6

All-Star Harmonica Blast featuring Omar Coleman, Rob Stone, Martin Lang, Joe Nosek, and Oscar Wilson 8 PM, Reggies' Music Joint, 2105 S. State, 312-949-0210, \$20, 21+

"Amplified: Chicago Blues"

A photo exhibit with interactive activities and live music. 9:30 AM-4:30 PM, Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark, 312-642-4600, \$19, \$17 students and seniors, free for children under 18 (must be Illinois residents)

Chicago Blues Camp Graduation Recital 6 PM, Rosa's Lounge, 3420 W. Armitage, 773-342-0452, \$10, free before 8 PM, 21+

Godfather's South Side Blues

Revue Enter through the side door, by the parking lot. 9 PM, Ambrosia Room, 5442 S. Damen, 773-476-0579, free, 21+

Original Chicago Blues All Stars

jam session 7 PM, Motor Row Brewing, 2337 S. Michigan, 312-624-8149, \$5, all ages

Pre-Fest Blues Bash featuring

Corky Siegel & Chamber Blues, Lynne Jordan, Toronzo Cannon 8 PM, City Winery, 1200 W. Randolph, 312-733-9463, \$35-\$48, all ages

"The Rolling Stones at Chess"

Photo exhibit. Noon-4 PM, Willie Dixon's Blues Heaven Foundation, 2120 S. Michigan, 312-808-1286, \$15, \$10 youth ages 5-17

"Unsung Bronzeville: A Musical History Exhibition"

Presented by the Chicago Blues Museum. Runs through June 30. Opening reception at 1:30 PM with a short talk by exhibit curators. 9 AM-4 PM, Harold Washington College, 30 E. Lake, 312-553-5600, free, all ages

FRIDAY 7

"Amplified: Chicago Blues"

A photo exhibit with interactive activities and live music. 9:30 AM-4:30 PM, Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark, 312-642-4600, \$19, \$17 students and seniors, free for children under 18 (must be Illinois residents)

Chicago Blues Super Session featuring Lurrie Bell, Billy Flynn, Deitra Farr, Bob Stroger, Brother John Kattke, Dave Katzman, Melvin Smith, David Sims, Omar Coleman

10 PM, Reggies' Music Joint, 2105 S. State, 312-949-0210, \$20, 21+

Doc Payne & the Payne Relief Smooth Blues Band with special guests

7 PM, Motor Row Brewing, 2337 S. Michigan, 312-624-8149, \$10 (two-drink minimum), 21+

Elmore James Jr. & the Broom-

dusters 9 PM, the Water Hole, 1400 S. Western, 312-243-7988, free (two-drink minimum), 21+

"Maxwell Street: Capturing the Essence of a Remembered/Forgotten Place"

Book discussion with author Tim Cresswell. 1 PM, Chicago State University, Gwendolyn Brooks Library, 9501

S. Martin Luther King, 773-995-2000, free, all ages, children must be accompanied by an adult

Mzz Reese (see page 30)

9 PM, Dr. J's Place, 3421 W. Chicago, free, 21+

"The Rolling Stones at Chess"

Photo exhibit. Noon-4 PM, Willie Dixon's Blues Heaven Foundation, 2120 S. Michigan, 312-808-1286, \$15, \$10 youth ages 5-17

Source One Band featuring New Orleans Beau

9 PM, Odyssey East, 9942 S. Torrence, 773-978-6520, free, 21+

"Unsung Bronzeville: A Musical History Exhibition"

Presented by the Chicago Blues Museum. Runs through June 30. 9 AM-4 PM, Harold Washington College, 30 E. Lake, 312-553-5600, free, all ages

SATURDAY 8

"Amplified: Chicago Blues"

A photo exhibit with interactive activities and live music. 9:30 AM-4:30 PM, Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark, 312-642-4600, \$19, \$17 students and seniors, free for children under 18 (must be Illinois residents)

Corey Dennison 9:10 PM (two sets), Miller Lite Beer Garden, Navy Pier, 600 E. Grand, free, all ages

Jazz, Blues, and Beyond Bus Tour

Reservation required. 10:30 AM, After-Words Books, 23 E. Illinois, 312-464-1110, \$65, all ages ➔

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CHICAGO BLUES FESTIVAL

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Fernando Jones benefit for the Blues Kids Foundation Blues Kids jam at 6:30 PM, pro jam at 8:30 PM, Fernando Jones at 11 PM. Motor Row Brewing, 2337 S. Michigan, 312-624-8149, \$10 (two-drink minimum), all ages

"The Rolling Stones at Chess" Photo exhibit. Noon-4 PM, Willie Dixon's Blues Heaven Foundation, 2120 S. Michigan, 312-808-1286, \$15, \$10 youth ages 5-17

Smiley Tillman Noon, River Roast, 315 N. LaSalle, 312-822-0100, free, all ages

"Unsung Bronzeville: A Musical History Exhibition" Presented by the Chicago Blues Museum. Runs through June 30. 9 AM-2 PM, Harold Washington College, 30 E. Lake, 312-553-5600, free, all ages

Wall of Denial Stevie Ray Vaughan tribute band. 5:30 PM (two sets), Miller Lite Beer Garden, Navy Pier, 600 E. Grand, free, all ages

Marvin Weathersby 2 PM (two sets), Miller Lite Beer Garden, Navy Pier, 600 E. Grand, free, all ages

SUNDAY 9

"Amplified: Chicago Blues" A photo exhibit with interactive activities and live music. Noon-5 PM, Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark, 312-642-4600, \$19, \$17 students and seniors, free for children under 18 (must be Illinois residents)

Blues at Maxwell Street Market with Vince "Lefty" Johnson, David Herrero, and others Noon, New Maxwell Street Market, 800 S. Des Plaines, free, all ages

Blues Fest after-party with Jimmy Johnson (see page 32), Billy Flynn, Bob Stroger, Melvin Smith, Dave Katzman, David Sims Sun 6/9, 9 PM, Reggie's Music Joint, 2105 S. State, free, 21+

Jimmy Johnson (see page 32) & Leo Charles 4:20 PM, Lagunitas Brewery Tap Room, 2607 W. 17th, 773-522-1308, free, 21+

Jamiah Rogers Noon, River Roast, 315 N. LaSalle, 312-822-0100, free, all ages

Source One Band featuring New Orleans Beau 8 PM, Odyssey East, 9942 S. Torrence, 773-978-6520, free, 21+

MONDAY 10

"Amplified: Chicago Blues" A photo exhibit with interactive activities and live music. 9:30 AM-4:30 PM, Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark, 312-642-4600, \$19, \$17 students and seniors, free for children under 18 (must be Illinois residents)

The Fantastic L'Roy 9:30 PM, Linda's Place, 1044 W. 51st, 773-373-2351, free, 21+ 

PICK OF THE WEEK

UK rapper Little Simz breaks out on the sonically diverse, expertly crafted *Grey Area*



JACK BRIDGLAND

LITTLE SIMZ, APRIL & VISTA
Tue 6/11, 7 PM, Lincoln Hall, 2424 N. Lincoln, \$20, all ages

UK RAPPER LITTLE SIMZ (born Simbiatu Ajikawo) is just 25 years old, but throughout the 2010s she's amassed a prolific discography of LPs, EPs, and mixtapes. She's generated a healthy buzz along the way, and now seems primed for mainstream success—her third full-length, March's *Grey Area* (Age 101), contains her catchiest and strongest songwriting to date. Produced by her childhood friend Inflo, *Grey Area* is a diverse album where no two songs sound alike. Live instrumentation stretches the palette, infusing hip-hop beats with rock 'n' roll energy and neosoul sensibilities and deftly setting up Simz's nimble, tongue-twisting raps and fiery delivery. Guest performances by electronic band Little Dragon, soul sing-

er Cleo Sol, reggae singer Chronixx, and indie singer-guitarist Michael Kiwanuka further diversify the vibe. Opening banger "Offence" is a perfect introduction to the album's eclecticism—driven by a thick synth line, squealing flute riffs, and soaring string accents, it sounds like a modernized take on a 1970s soundtrack for a car-chase scene. And for every track where Simz goes hard, such as "Boss" ("I'm a boss in a fuckin' dress!") and "Venom" ("Never givin' credit where it's due 'cause you don't like pussy in power"), she includes a soulful song about heartbreak ("Sherbet Sunset") or a jazzy elegy ("Flowers"). Catch her now before she blows up.

—SCOTT MORROW

THURSDAY6

INTER ARMA, THANTIFAXATH *Inter Arma* headline; *Thantifaxath*, *Pulchra Morte*, and *Atonement Theory* open. 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 2105 S. State, \$15. 17+

Richmond quintet **Inter Arma** have just released their fourth full-length, *Sulphur English* (Relapse), and it is a monster. The band, who share three members with furious black-metal environmental avengers Bastard Sapling, bring a razor-sharp, savage edge to their lumbering, spine-crushing atmospheric doom. Unlike many superheavy slow bands, Inter Arma don't make music that feels relaxing or somnambulant—the new album's down-tempo passages, proggy space voyages, and acoustic interludes provide enough mystery and surprise to keep you on your toes before bringing you to your knees. Southern bands also tend to have a talent for bucolic horror, and in this case, it's most apparent in the Nick Cave-like gravitas of the eerie "Blood on the Lupines." The year is still young, but I already know that *Sulphur English* will make many "Best of 2019" lists when the time comes. Touring with Inter Arma are enigmatic Toronto black-metal trio **Thantifaxath** (the members prefer to stay anonymous), who have a powerful, distinctive, and captivating sound. Their 2017 EP, *Void Masquerading as Matter* (Dark Descent), is angular, cold, and claustrophobic, with something uncannily eldritch about the way its riffs and lines intersect at discomfiting angles—and the band's well-developed sense of beauty only makes the music more fearsome and ominous. —MONICA KENDRICK

HOT STOVE COOL MUSIC: CELEBRATING MUSIC, BASEBALL, AND GIVING BACK

Featuring the Chicago Children's Choir, the Chicago Hot Stove All-Stars (featuring Theo Epstein and Len Kasper), Band of Their Own, Peter Gammons & the Boston Hot Stove All-Stars (featuring Bernie Williams, Jake Peavy, and Will Dailey), and special guests. 8 PM, Metro, 3730 N. Clark, \$75. 18+

You never know who might show up at Hot Stove Cool Music Chicago, an annual benefit concert that brings the city's baseball and music communities together to support nonprofits helping urban youth and families. In past years, Eddie Vedder has crowd-surfed, Jimmy Chamberlin has hit the skins, and Rick Nielsen and Tom Petersson have played a Cheap Trick number. That element of surprise is just part of the magic of the event, which was cofounded by Baseball Hall of Fame journalist Peter Gammons in Boston in 2000. Five years later, Gammons joined forces with Boston Red Sox general manager Theo Epstein, who'd created a charity named Foundation to Be Named Later with his twin brother, Paul. HSCM became the main fund-raiser for the foundation, and after Epstein became president of baseball operations for the Chicago Cubs, he helped launch a Chicago edition of the event in 2012. Since then, the Boston and Chicago benefits have raised a total of almost \$10 million. WXRT DJ Lin Brehmer emcees this year's HSCM Chicago, which benefits Cubs Charities and Founda- ➔

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08/17 THE BOUNCING SOULS
08/19 TED LEO (SOLO) @ TOP NOTE
09/06 + 09/07 THE GROWLERS
09/15 THE MIDNIGHT
09/19 - 09/22 COLD WAVES VIII
09/26 MELVINS / REDD KROSS
10/04 GUS DAPPERTON

MUSIC



Claudi Love of
Pinc Lounds
by STEVEN PATERS

continued from 39
tion to Be Named Later and features supergroups drawn from the worlds of baseball and music. Participating artists are associated with a variety of genres and eras, though the 90s are represented pretty heavily: the Chicago Children's Choir, Band of Their Own (with members of the Bangles, Belly, Letters to Cleo, the Flat Five, and Blake Babies), Peter Gammons & the Boston Hot Stove All-Stars (featuring onetime New York Yankee Bernie Williams and singer-songwriter Will Dailey, as well as members of the Upper Crust, Letters to Cleo, and the Gravel Pit), and the Chicago Hot Stove All-Stars (featuring Cubs sportscaster Len Kasper, Scott Lucas, and Jason Narducy). There's also a special guest on deck, whose identity will only be revealed onstage—in previous years audiences have been surprised by Liz Phair, Smashing Pumpkins, and the Cubs' Anthony Rizzo and David Ross. So it's possible you'll hear "Go Cubs Go," but it's more likely that the night's MVP will play a few original songs before joining their fellow performers for some classic rock and alternative covers. It's anyone's ball game. —**KIRSTEN LAMBERT**

tion and got into a "musical standoff" with Mundo, who was playing bucket drums a little too close to her. Their confrontation quickly turned into a collaboration, and after that impromptu duet they became friends. Whichever story is real, Pinc Lounds did frequently perform in that subway station—in tribute, they named their 2018 debut full-length *Delancey St. Station* (Tunnel Vision). If any band can redeem the word "quirky," it's these weirdos: they flitter around punk, folk, and doo-wop, with Love's exaggerated, brassy vocals guiding the way. They create a loose, sprawling sound, as though they'd scavenged their instruments from a junkyard (and sometimes they could have—Bear is credited with upright bass and "peanut can"). And they lay on the whimsy in their rambunctious acoustic arrangements and lively performances. Love has described their shows as "immersive cabarets," and they sometimes include actors, dancers, and puppeteers parading as garbage cans or lined up in a subway-train costume. In the mid-2000s, when Brooklyn's music scene was more idiosyncratic than it is now, Pinc Lounds might've blended into the background, but in 2019 they stand out—proving that strange and wonderful things can still grow in the cracks of gentrification's pavement. —**LEOR GALIL**

FRIDAY7

PINC LOUDS See also Sunday, 7 PM, *Sleeping Village*, 3734 W. Belmont. 21+ **FREE**

Guitarist, singer, and kalimba player Claudie Love has a couple different origin stories for her band, a bizarre and borderline cartoonish antifolk group called Pinc Lounds. In an April interview with Ad Hoc, she says she met upright bassist Ofer Bear and percussionist Rai Mundo at a Day of the Dead party three years ago. But in an October 2018 interview with the website *Madness to Creation*, Love says she was busking at the Delancey Street subway sta-

ACQUAINTANCES *Gnarboyz* open. 8:30 PM, *Empty Bottle*, 1035 N. Western, \$10. 21+

Five-piece Chicago-Philadelphia indie-rock supergroup Acquaintances maintain a satisfying simmer on their self-titled 2013 debut, but they really come to a boil on their follow-up, the new *8 1/2 Lives* (File 13). Consisting of three guitarist-vocalists—Jered Gummere of the Ponys, Stephen Schmidt of Thumbnail, and Justin Sinkovich of Atombomb-pocketknife and Poison Arrows—plus bassist Patrick Morris (Don Caballero, Poison Arrows) and drummer Chris Wilson (Ted Leo & the Pharma-

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cists), Acquaintances are a meeting of minds in which each player brings his best qualities to the table. Anchored by Wilson's always airtight drumming, the songs on *8 1/2 Lives* blend Gummere's signature hooky melodies with Morris and Sinkovich's knotty, obtuse complexity to create music that adds catchiness to its nastiness and warmth to its darkness. This show is the band's second live performance ever, and the first is their concert in Bloomington, Illinois, the night before. —**LUCA CIMARUSTI**

SATURDAY8

NAILS *Misery Index, Outer Heaven, Ulthar, and Hate Force* open. 6:30 PM, Metro, 3730 N. Clark, \$23. 18+

In the current state of all things heavy, brutal, and loud, it's hard to top California powerviolence band Nails. For their third full-length, 2016's *You Will Never Be One of Us* (Nuclear Blast), the Oxnard four-piece put together one of the toughest records in recent memory, piling up doomy dirges, aggressive crust punk, guttural grind, and enough dive-bomb guitar solos to make Kerry King blush. It's been a three-year wait for new Nails tunes, and their brand-new seven-inch delivers everything you'd want and more: the A side is "I Don't Want to Know You," a ridiculously chaotic 70-second grind blast that crushes together unrelenting vocal trade-offs and nonstop, bombed-out riffing. On the B side "Endless Resistance," Nails team up with extreme-metal legend Max Cavalera (Sepultura,

Soulfly, Killer Be Killed), settling into a deep groove while Cavalera completely cuts loose on vocals. Nails turn ten this year, and as one of the heaviest and hardest bands in the game, they're only getting heavier and harder with age. —**LUCA CIMARUSTI**

ANTHONY PATERAS 8 PM, *Lampo at Graham Foundation, Madlener House, 4 W. Burton*, registration required via Eventbrite.com. **FREE** 

On two recent multidisc sets, Australian composer, improviser, and electroacoustic musician Anthony Pateras chronicles his compulsive drive to try new things and move on. In the booklet that accompanies *Bern • Melbourne • Milan*, a release by his trio with drummer Sean Baxter and guitarist David Brown, Baxter recalls that Pateras wowed him and Brown with a solo piano performance that combined classical and jazz gestures with grindcore intensity. When the two of them approached Pateras about forming a collaborative project in 2002, he agreed, but he told them that he was about to stop playing classical music entirely. The two-CD set covers the trio's 16-year existence, and though at times Pateras sounds like a man rummaging through crushed cans or summoning a rainfall of disembodied notes, he never settles into a genre. Pateras's five-disc *Collected Works Vol. II* (2005-2018) has more variety in its personnel—it includes orchestral compositions, group improvisations, and pieces for other musicians—and each recording investigates a different effect or concern. On "A Reality in Which Everything Is Substitution" (2012), a flute phrase reminiscent of birdsong resolutely ➔



Anthony Pateras
 AFARINA

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19

BON IVER

ALLSTATE
ARENA

ROSEMONT,
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F E I S T

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MUSIC

continued from 41

goes nowhere; “Prayer for Nil” bombards the supple voice of soprano Jessica Aszodi with electronically crumpled versions of itself; and “Ontetradecagon” (2010) spreads an ensemble of veteran improvisers around a concert hall to thwart their habit of working as a collective. The last time nonprofit arts organization Lampo hosted Pateras, the pianist frantically pummeled the keys of a grand piano to summon paradoxically slow-moving clouds of sound. This time, he’ll use a quadraphonic speaker system to layer static tones from synthesizers and tape delays into a vertigo-inducing maelstrom. —**BILL MEYER**

TC SUPERSTAR *Sean Green and the Slaps* open. 9:30 PM, Cole’s, 2338 N. Milwaukee. 21+ 

Synth-driven Austin indie-pop group TC Superstar count eight people in their ranks, four of them dancers—and the dancers’ steps are just as important as the musicians’ notes. “The dancers are not ‘backup dancers,’” synth player and vocalist Aaron Chavez told *The Daily Texan* in April. “Dancing and the music are one thing.” TC Superstar’s lively performances and accessible choreographed routines (the latter by LB Flett) have attracted a cult following in their hometown, even catching the eye of Beto O’Rourke’s congressional team—it booked the group for an August 2018 outreach event and party called “Back to School with Beto.” From the outside, it’s hard to tell how or whether the dancers shaped the music on the group’s third album, the new *R&D* (Porchfire), but the gentle, straightforward melodies and clean, simple rhythms work together to encourage you to move your body. The only wrong dance steps, the music seems to suggest, are the ones not taken. —**LEOR GALIL**

SUNDAY9

BILLIE EILISH *Denzel Curry* opens. 7:30 PM, United Center, 1901 W. Madison, sold out. 

The myth of 17-year-old pop star Billie Eilish is that she blew up overnight at age 13, after she uploaded

the dreamy, trap-inflected “Ocean Eyes” to Soundcloud and it went viral. That was in November 2015, and by the following summer she’d signed a joint deal with Darkroom and Interscope. But that narrative omits the influence of her actor parents, who homeschooled Eilish and her older brother, 21-year-old Finneas O’Connell—in 1997, the year O’Connell was born, one of the top hits was “MMMBop,” written by three homeschooled Oklahoma brothers, and Eilish’s parents figured that a similar education might help their kids develop their artistic sides. Their daughter proved herself gifted at a young age, capable of summoning the gravitas of a long-suffering blues musician, and O’Connell has been her primary collaborator and producer for her entire short career. They build her songs around a variety of sounds, including quaking EDM bass, fingerpicked folk guitar, soul-baring R&B piano, and perforating rap percussion; as she recently told the *New York Times*, she doesn’t want to fall into any single genre, but rather to make something that’s identifiably “Billie Eilish kind of music.” This approach isn’t unique, of course—Halsey and Khalid, to name just two others, have become pop phenoms by occupying a similar aesthetic gray area—but Eilish brings a nuanced, unconventional approach to her distinctive songwriting, and she’s developed a persona that flirts with darkness. After a rash of singles and the 2017 EP *Don’t Smile at Me*, in March she finally dropped her first full-length, *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?*, which debuted at number one on the Billboard 200. The album’s songs sometimes blur together into corporate-playlist pop wallpaper, but Eilish still distinguishes herself with the restraint and severity of her expression, which allows her to concentrate a wallop of emotion into a single carefully tooled line. And when she gets grim—as she does with the industrial stomp of “Bury a Friend”—she sounds like no one else. —**LEOR GALIL**

ARI LENNOX *Baby Rose, Mikhala Jene, and Ron Gilmore* open. 8:30 PM, Bottom Lounge, 1375 W. Lake, sold out. 17+

With the May release of her unflinching debut, *Shea Butter Baby* (Dreamville), D.C. native Ari Len-



TC Superstar  JESUS ACOSTA

nox establishes herself as a vital voice in contemporary R&B. On album opener “Chicago Boy,” she muses about a guy she meets by chance in a Chicago CVS and the sexual escapades that ensue: “Might, might bend it over / Love you like Sosa,” she sings over sultry jazz instrumentation. And this is all before she ends the song with a spoken disclaimer about how “fucking freaky” things are about to get. “Freaky” is undeniably accurate—on the next track, “BMO (Break Me Off),” she immediately gets into the nitty-gritty of her desires—but it doesn’t capture the full scope of what Lennox does on *Shea Butter Baby*. She colors the highs, lows, and in-betweens of being a Black woman in her 20s with lyrics about looking for love on Tinder, taking cheap trips on Amtrak, and enjoying the freedom of drinking from Dollar Tree wineglasses in her own crib. On “New Apartment” she sings, “Pop my woo-hah in the sky / ‘Cause nobody here to judge my life.” And if somebody decides to judge anyway, she doesn’t hold back: “Get the fuck on / If you got somethin’ to say / Hey, uh, fuck that shit that you talkin’, uh / Get the fuck out my apartment, ayy.” The harshness of her admonishment contrasts starkly with her soothing singing, but that sort of juxtaposition is on brand for Lennox: “I’ve just always been very blunt,” she said in an interview with DJBooth. “I’ve always been too blunt. I’ve always been too honest.” The only sugarcoating she does comes in the form of that buttery voice, which she uses to invite us into the intimate sketches of her life she creates with *Shea Butter Baby*. At tonight’s show, she’ll bring her fans even more directly into that space. —**MATT HARVEY**

PINC LOUDS See Friday. *Jesse Marchant* headlines; *Pinc Louds and Half Gringa* (duo) open. 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, \$10. 21+

TUESDAY11

LITTLE SIMZ See *Pick of the Week*, page 39. *April & Vista* open. 7 PM, Lincoln Hall, 2424 N. Lincoln, \$20. 

LIONEL RICHIE *JC Brooks Band* opens. See also Wednesday. 7:30 PM, Ravinia Pavilion, 418 Sheridan, Highland Park, \$56-\$172. 

In a story line from 80s comic strip *Bloom County*, fictional heavy metal band Deathtongue (whose lead guitarist and resident “Ack”-er, Bill the Cat, wears a Twisted Sister wig) try to get a record deal from a big-time record exec, but things grind to a halt when they share the lyrics from their hottest track, “Let’s Run Over Lionel Richie With a Tank.” The big-time record exec is sitting directly in front of a portrait of Richie (signed “To Clive, Thanks! Lionel”), and he tells Deathtongue, “You can slam the door behind you.” Richie’s music—both solo and with soul and funk band the Commodores—was never intended to ruffle feathers, so Deathtongue aren’t necessarily wrong to call it “middle-of-the-road.” But before you write it off as merely an opiate of the masses, be honest—you remember all the words to his songs, don’t you? The word “hits” is slapped front and center in a neon font directly under Richie’s photo in the promotional materials for his current Hello tour, reassuring fans that yes, they’re bound to hear the wiggle-the-elders-from-their-pavilion-seats 1986 anthem “Dancing on the Ceiling” and the similarly inspirational 1983 hit “All Night Long (All Night),” which was accompanied by a truly weird video directed by the Monkees’ Michael Nesmith. I especially love the gorgeous tearjerker “Still,” from the Commodores’ 1979 album *Midnight Magic*, which transcends R&B to become a ballad for the ages; at his concerts, Richie usually includes a portion of it in a medley of songs he wrote for the band. He’s probably the only artist to have won an Oscar, a Grammy, and a Golden Globe who can say he’s been covered by Faith No More and Kenny Rogers. If I can’t dance on the ceiling, I don’t want to be part of the revolution. —**SALEM COLLO-JULIN**

WEDNESDAY12

LIONEL RICHIE See Tuesday. *JC Brooks Band* opens. 7:30 PM, Ravinia Pavilion, 418 Sheridan, Highland Park, \$56-\$172.  



— COMING —

2019 SPECIAL ISSUES

June 6 **CHICAGO BLUES FESTIVAL**

June 20 **PRIDE ISSUE: STONEWALL 50**

July 18 **PITCHFORK MUSIC FESTIVAL**

August 1 **LOLLAPALOOZA**

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- 6.8 Josh Garrels w/ the Gray Havens
- 6.12 Ones To Watch Presents **ARIZONA** w/ MORGXN **LOW TICKET WARNING**
- 6.14 The Ultimate Tribute to Metallica: The Four Horsemen
- 6.15 Trap Karaoke
- 6.19 Lovelytheband w/ Flora Cash & New Dialogue **LOW TICKET WARNING**
- 6.20 93.9 Lite FM Presents Howard Jones, Men Without Hats & All Hail The Silence
- 6.21 Alex Aiono w/ 4th Ave & Aja9 **6.22 Saved by the 90's**
- 6.28 Chon w/ DOMi + JD Beck
- 6.29 Anberlin **SOLD OUT!** **6.30 Anberlin** **LOW TICKET WARNING**
- 7.1 August Burns Red w/ Silverstein & Silent Planet
- 7.2 X Ambassadors w/ Your Smith **7.11 Pouya** w/ Ramirez & Boobie Lootaveli
- 7.13 Lyfe Jennings **7.14 Iration** w/ Pepper, Fortunate Youth & Katastro
- 7.15 Chase Atlantic w/ Lauren Sanderson
- 7.24 Lights w/ tiLLie **7.27 Screeching Weasel** w/ The Queens and Bigwig

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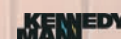
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EARLY WARNINGS

CHICAGO SHOWS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IN THE WEEKS TO COME

ALL AGES FREE



Sharon Van Etten RYAN PFLUGER

NEW

Melody Angel, Mary Lane 6/13, 8:30 PM, Rosa's Lounge
Arkells, Michigander 8/3, 11 PM, Sleeping Village, on sale Wed 6/5, 10 AM
Aweful, Touched by Ghoul, Boybrain, DJ Andy Ryan 8/1, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Band of Friends: a celebration of Rory Gallagher with Davy Knowles, Gerry McAvo, Ted McKenna 11/29, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Banks, Kevin Garrett 9/16, 8 PM, Riviera Theatre, on sale Fri 6/14, 10 AM
Beach Slang 7/14, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Alec Benjamin, Bulow 8/1, 11 PM, Schubas, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Bird and the Bee, Alex Lilly, Samantha Sidley 8/12, 8 PM, Sleeping Village, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Boy Pablo 8/2, 11 PM, Schubas, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Bishop Briggs, Shaed 8/1, 11 PM, the Vic, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Cavetown 10/6, 6:30 PM, Metro, on sale Fri 6/7, noon
Chelsea Cutler, G-Flip 8/2, 11 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Mikal Cronin, Shannon Lay 11/15, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+
Lauren Daigle, Devon Gilfillian 8/2, 11 PM, the Vic, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Kizz Daniel 7/21, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Davina & the Vagabonds 10/7, 7:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Orbert Davis Sextet featuring Ari Brown 6/30, 7:30 PM, Logan Center for the Arts

Death Cab for Cutie, Beach Bunny 8/1, 11 PM, Metro, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Mike Farris 9/15, 7:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Fauvely, Gone Valley, Jessica Risker 7/16, 9:30 PM, Hideout
FKJ, (((O))) 7/31, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 17+
Francis & the Lights 8/3, 11 PM, Park West, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Girl Band 10/2, 7:30 PM, Beat Kitchen, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
John Gorka 8/31, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Fri 6/7
Greensky Bluegrass 10/31, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre, on sale Fri 6/7, noon
Gud Vibrations, Svdden Death, Wavedash 8/1, 10 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 17+
Half Alive, Bad Child 7/31, 7:30 PM, Schubas, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Howard Hewett 8/25, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Fri 6/7, noon
Hobo Johnson & the Lovemakers 7/31, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge
Honey Island Swamp Band 9/13, 10 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Honne, Role Model 8/1, 11 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Hovvdy & Lomelda 8/26, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Eric Hutchinson 10/7, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Fri 6/7, noon
Idles, A Place to Bury Strangers 8/1, 11 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Injury Reserve, Slauson Malone, Body Meat 10/3, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM

Jade Bird, Wilderado 8/3, 11 PM, Schubas, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Japanese Breakfast 8/2, 11 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Jazz Institute of Chicago's Birthday Bash with Makaya McCraven Quintet 6/28, 7:30 PM, the Promontory
J.I.D. 8/3, 10 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Cody Jinks 8/22, 7 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 17+
Lucy Kaplansky 11/15, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
L.A. VanGogh, Finkel, Mari 7/27, 9 PM, Schubas, 18+
Benjamin Francis Leftwich 10/10, 8 PM, Sleeping Village
Lennon Stella 7/31, 7:30 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Louis the Child's Playground 8/4, 11 PM, Metro, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Magic City Hippies 8/2, 10 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Mamby on the Beach festival day one with Brockhampton, Quinn XCII, Zhu, Santigold, Arizona, Flying Lotus 3D, Wajatta (Reggie Watts & John Tejada), Justin Martin, and more 8/23, noon, Montrose Beach
Mamby on the Beach festival day two with Troye Sivan, Phantogram, Sylvan Esso, Virtual Self, Summer Walker, Sofi Tukker, Bob Moses, DJ Seinfeld, and more 8/24, noon, Montrose Beach
Masego, Bri Steves 8/3, 11 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Matt and Kim 10/22, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+

Men I Trust, Slow Pulp 8/2, 11 PM, Sleeping Village, on sale Wed 6/5, 10 AM
Meute 10/15, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Mike Doughty, Ghost of Mr. Oberon 10/23, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Malina Moye, Mzz Reese 6/29, 9:30 PM, Buddy Guy's Legends
Jason Mraz 11/23-11/24, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Mulberry Street (Billy Joel tribute) 7/2, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Fri 6/7, noon
Mutual Benefit 9/1, 8 PM, Schubas, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Anders Osborne 8/17, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Outlier at Lakefront Green with Bonobo (DJ set), Derrick Carter, DJ Boring, Quantic (DJ set), Juan MacLean (DJ set), Machinedrum 7/6, 2 PM, Theater on the Lake
Ellis Paul 11/2, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Pixel Grip (DJ set) 7/3, 9 PM, Sleeping Village
Plastician, Klasey Jones 7/25, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Purling Hiss, Writhing Squares 7/18, 9 PM, Hideout
Rectal Hygienics, Stimulant, Mellow Harsher, Bottomed 6/19, 9:30 PM, Sleeping Village
RL Grime, 99 Neighbors 8/2, 10 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 17+
Rufus Du Sol, Willaris K 7/31, 9 PM, the Vic, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
San Holo (DJ set), Sober Rob 8/4, 10 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 17+
(Sandy) Alex G 8/3, 10 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Snail Mail, Tirzah 7/20, 10:30 PM, Thalia Hall, on sale Thu 6/13, 10 AM, 17+
Jay Som, Gia Margaret, Boy Scouts 10/18, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Sons of the Never Wrong 11/24, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Stereolab 7/19, 10:30 PM, Thalia Hall, on sale Thu 6/13, 10 AM, 18+
Still Woozy, Slenderbodies 8/4, 11 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Talisk 8/12, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Fri 6/7, noon
Livingston Taylor 9/13, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston
This Is Not This Heat 7/23, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Thoom, Ariel Zetina, Itsi 6/16, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Kali Uchis, Iris Temple 7/30,

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7 PM, Metro, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Undu: Nicole Mitchell, Jonathan Woods, Tatsu Aoki & the Miyumi Project 6/29, 2 PM, Logan Center for the Arts
Sharon Van Etten, Dehd 8/3, 11 PM, Lincoln Hall, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM, 18+
Matt Wertz 8/19, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Fri 6/7, noon
Kelly Willis, Bruce Robison 11/2, 10 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
Lee Ann Womack 10/4-10/5, 8 PM, City Winery
Wilder Woods 9/23, 7:30 PM, Metro, on sale Fri 6/7, 10 AM
X, Folk Uke 6/26, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Fri 6/7, noon

UPCOMING

Joshua Abrams's Natural Information Society 6/28, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+
Altan 8/7, 8 PM, City Winery
Toranzo Cannon 6/29, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Rosanne Cash & Ry Cooder 6/18, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre
Cayucas 7/9, 8 PM, Schubas
Imelda Marcos, Big Syn, Not for You 7/12, 9 PM, Empty Bottle
Trevor Jackson 6/26, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+
Hayden James, Naations 9/27, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+
Leela James 6/25, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
Nelly, TLC 8/18, 7 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park
Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real, Los Coast 9/26, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+
NRBQ 6/21-22, 8 PM, Hideout
Purple Mountains (David Berman) 8/24-8/25, 9 PM, Sleeping Village
Reader Pride Block Party 6/23, 1 PM, Marz Community Brewing Co., all-ages block party with DJ sets, dance lessons, drag history with Lucy Stoolie, Femme Slash tribute to Janet Jackson, and more
Reso, Ultrasloth, Maru 6/14, 10:45 PM, Bottom Lounge, 18+
Geoff Tate's Operation: Mind-crime 6/16, 7 PM, Reggies' Rock Club, 17+
Teddy & the Rough Riders, Emily Nenni 6/27, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle



GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

SINCE DEBUTING in 2012, local progressive death-metal quintet **Warforged** has tantalized this wolf with a trail of brutal bread crumbs, including the concise 2014 EP *Essence of the Land*. In May the band finally dropped their debut full-length, **I: Voice**, via Nashville label the **Artisan Era**, and it's a main course of an album—70 minutes of hemorrhage-inducing beats and atmospheric interludes, with enough stylistic switch-ups to make John Zorn jealous! Warforged are wickedly adept at cross-pollination: the blend of ghostly black-metal vocal effects, *Bitches Brew*-esque jazz riffing, and distended blast-beats on “Old Friend” somehow sounds, well, almost natural. Warforged are touring in support of Inanimate Existence, and on Monday, June 10, both bands hit **Cobra Lounge** with Caecus and Wounds.

Will **Jordan Reyes** ever slow down? He already runs tape label **American Damage**, performs with **Ono**, co-owns **Moniker Records**, and occasionally writes for the *Reader*—and on Friday, June 14, he fires up another label, **American Dreams**. It debuts with **Close**, a haunting solo synth collection from Reyes. “Making music on the synthesizer is an activity of erasure for me,” he explains. “I think a lot about addiction still, and how that impulse, habit, biochemistry has warped since I quit drinking and drugging.” He says that getting lost in a synth helps his recovery the same way long-distance running has. On Bandcamp you can get a limited edition of *Close* with a signed print from cover artist JJ Cromer.

Annual vinyl show **C.R.A.T.E.S.**, organized by **Funk Trunk** founder **Quinn Cunningham** (it stands for “Chicago Record and Turntable Enthusiast Swap”), returns this weekend at Evanston’s **Temperance Beer Co.** Among its 30-plus tables of vendors are FeelTrip, Wild Prairie Vinyl & Vintage, and South Rhodes Records (which aims to open a south-side storefront soon). C.R.A.T.E.S. runs from 11 AM to 5 PM on Saturday, June 8, and Sunday, June 9. —**J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL**

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip_Wolf or e-mail gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com.

WOLF BY KEITH HERZIK

OPINION

SAVAGE LOVE

Baby want candy

An adult diaper lover wants to come out with his kink. Plus: Does mom know best when it comes to Daddy Dom?

By **DAN SAVAGE**

Q: I'm a 27-year-old male adult baby/diaper lover (AB/DL). I've been in the closet about my fetish basically since puberty. As a consequence, I never dated or became romantically involved. I thought if I buried my kink with enough shame, it would go away and I would somehow turn normal. It obviously didn't work, and for the past year, I've been trying to find healthy ways to integrate this into my life. I play around with the kink in the privacy of my home and otherwise lead a normal life. My depression issues have let up, I'm more confident day to day, and even work has begun to improve. I went on a normal date, and I felt very inauthentic trying to be engaged when my kink wasn't present or at least out in the open. I just wasn't excited by the idea of a vanilla relationship. I would like to date women, but there's such an imbalance between men and women with this particular kink that I don't feel like I'll ever meet someone who is compatible. I feel like I'm doomed to be lonely forever with my kink or sexually unfulfilled and terrified of being found out. —**BOY ALONE BASICALLY ETERNALLY**

A: "It's OK to not reveal every aspect of your sex life on a first date," said Lo, a kink-positive

podcaster and AB/DL whose show explores all aspects of your shared kink. "Besides, saying 'I like to wear diapers' on the first date is a surefire way to scare someone off. A better strategy is to establish a connection with a person, determine whether or not they're trustworthy, and then open up about AB/DL. That takes time."

Lo also doesn't think you should write off vanilla people as potential partners.

"BABE should know that it's possible to convert someone to the AB/DL side," said Lo. "I see it happen all the time. That's the focus of *Dream a Little*, my AB/DL podcast. Most of the people I feature are men who have turned their female partners on to AB/DL, so the odds are in your favor."

That doesn't mean you're guaranteed success the first time you disclose your kink to a partner, BABE. But you'll never find someone with whom you're compatible unless you're willing to risk opening up to someone. ➔



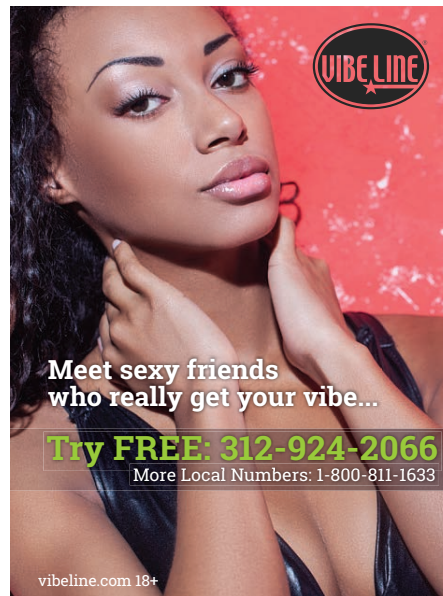
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OPINION

continued from 45

“BABE is more likely to be doomed to the #forever-alone club if he gives up entirely out of fear,” said Lo. “Being an AB/DL poses some unique challenges in the dating world, but thousands of other AB/DLs have found a way to make it work, and he can too.”

Now, before people start freaking out, it’s not just AB/DLs who “convert” or “turn” vanilla partners on to their kinks. There are two kinds of people at any big kink event (BDSM party, furry convention, piss splashdown): the people who’ve been aware of their kinks since puberty (and masturbating about them since puberty), and the people who fell in love with those people. So Lo isn’t telling BABE to do anything that people with other kinks aren’t advised to do all the time: date, establish trust, and then lay your kink cards on the table.

“BABE still views his kink as an impossible obstacle, and it doesn’t need to be that way,” said Lo. “It’s so important that you learn how to accept your kink, because then you will know you’re capable of and deserving of love.”

And finally, BABE, if and when you do meet a woman who is willing to indulge you, don’t neglect her sexual needs. I answered a letter years ago from a frustrated woman who was preparing to leave her AB/DL husband because he never wanted to have vanilla sex and, as much as she’d come to enjoy AB/DL occasionally, she no longer felt like her needs mattered to him. Don’t make the same mistake that guy did—or you could, after a long search for a compatible partner, find yourself miserable and alone again.

Q: I need help deciding whether to listen to my mother on the matter

of what’s best for me romantically or ask her to keep her opinions about my boyfriend to herself. My mom and I have always been close. She is a single parent and I am an only child. I’ve always told her everything. I’ve been in a long-distance Daddy Dom/little girl relationship with a middle-aged man with spina bifida for three years. We met on FetLife right before I turned 19. The entire time, my mom has made fun of his disability while occasionally putting her pettiness aside and acknowledging that he’s good to me. I made the mistake of telling her about the BDSM element, and she is extremely uncomfortable with it, though she denies that it is why she disapproves. My Daddy comes from a middle-class family and has been known to say insensitive shit on occasion about working-class people like my mom and me. I checked my Daddy on his privilege, and he doesn’t say stupid shit about the jobs we work anymore. I love my Daddy and can’t stand the idea of leaving him, but at times I wonder if my mom is right that me loving him isn’t enough. He makes me feel loved and taken care of in a way no one else has before, but I worry about whether I can have a future with someone who doesn’t work, who my mom hates, and who might be a little bit of an asshole? (Do a couple instances of rudeness make a man an asshole?) Help. I’m lost. —DUMB DAUGHTER LOVES GUY

A: Your entire relationship with your boyfriend—from the sound of things—has taken place online. Which is fine—people can forge strong connections online. But until you meet this man in person (assuming you haven’t already), DDLG, and unless you’re working

toward moving to where he lives, this relationship probably won’t last forever—which is also fine. A relationship doesn’t have to last forever to have been a success. This guy played an important (and still ongoing) role in your sexual development and brought you a lot of joy . . . and you can acknowledge those things while simultaneously acknowledging the reality of the situation: The man you were with when you were 18 is probably not the man you’ll be with when you’re 28. That’s true for most people, DDLG, regardless of their kinks, distance from their lovers, relationships with their mothers, etc.

As for whether your boyfriend is an asshole . . . well, he certainly said some insensitive/assholey/classist things, DDLG, you let him know that wasn’t OK, and he knocked it off. It’s not proof he doesn’t still think those things, but it is evidence he cares enough about you (or fears losing you enough) to stop saying those things. So even if he is an asshole, he is capable of moderating his assholeery, which is something not all assholes can do.

As for your mom . . . just because you shared everything with her when you were a child doesn’t mean you have to or should as an adult. There are things a mother has a right not to know, as my mother used to say, and her child’s kinks fall under the “right not to know” header. When it comes to your romantic and sexual interests, DDLG, share the rough outlines with your mom (“I’m seeing this guy, it’s long-distance, he’s nice”), but spare her the intimate details (BDSM, DD/LG, whatever else). 

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Senior Software Engineer Core Services (Foot Locker Retail, Inc.) (Chicago, IL): Work in an

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Senior Software Engineer Mobile (Foot Locker Retail, Inc. (Chicago, IL): Prticpte in creating globl native mobile applcatns for all Foot Locker chains wrldwide. Req a Master of Science deg or for equivilnt in Comp Engrng/ Science, Mgmt: Info Systems or a rel fld & two (2) yrs of exp as a Tech Analyst or Sftwre Engrn supprng mobile applcatns dvlpmnt. Exp must incl: Cndctng prfrmnce optimization on Android applcatns; Imprvng applcatn prfrmnce by detctng memory leaks; Utilzng DDMS Tls & Technologies inclng Scrum, Android Studio, Android SDK, Splunk Mint, and Github Enterprise; Debugging & prvdng solutns for Android technicl issues in the applcatns; and Dvlpgng solutn architecture for mobile Android platform based on analysis of solutn alternatvs, framwrks, & prdcts. Send resumes to Attn: C. Mouglin (Sr. Director, Global Comp), Code IL-4, Foot Locker Retail, Inc., 330 West 34th St, New York, NY 10001. (06/06)

Software Engineer Data (Foot Locker Retail, Inc.) (Chicago, IL): Design, test, & dvlp stfwr systms that prnt invlvt anyltcl data solutns which will addrs hghly complex biz inquiries. Req a Bachelor's degree or for equiv in Comp Sci, Engrng, or a rel fld & 5 yrs of progressively resp exp as a Sftwre Developer, Data Engrn, or a rel pos. Exp must incl: Assisting w/ Design, Dvlpmnt, Testg, Deploymt & Support phases of Sftwre Dvlpmnt Life Cycle (SDLC); Developg distrbtd & Cloud-Based applcatn stfwr that process data in real-time utilizng Java, Python & Scala; Desgnng & dvlpgng Restful APIs to integrt isolated systms w/ indepndt domains usng Java, Spring, & Spring Boot; Dvlpgng distrbtd data pipelines & ETL (Extract Transform-Load) jobs usng Datastage, Hadoop, & Hive & Spark; Analyzng prfrmce of SQL queries & providing tuning recommdatns in Oracle, My SQL, SQL Server, & Netezza; & Automating Unit Test Cases for all App components usng JUnit Framework. Send resumes to Attn: C. Mouglin (Sr. Director, Global Comp), Code IL-3, Foot Locker Retail, Inc., 330 West 34th St, New York, NY 10001. (06/06)

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Notice is hereby given, pursuant to "An Act in relation to the use of an Assumed

Business Name in the conduct of transaction of Business in the State," as amended, that a certification was registered by the undersigned with the County Clerk of Cook County. Registration Number: Y19001260 on May 1, 2019 Under the Assumed Business Name of BB + IDA with the business located at: 1437 Gunderson Ave, Berwyn, IL 60402. The true and real full name(s) and residence address of the owner(s)/partner(s) is: Owner/Partner Full Name: Jessica Ventura Duhig. Complete address: 1437 Gunderson Ave., Berwyn, IL 60402, USA (06/06)

Notice is hereby given, pursuant to "An Act in relation to the use of an Assumed Business Name in the conduct or transaction of Business in the State," as amended, that a certification was registered by the undersigned with the County Clerk of Cook County. Registration Number: Y19001299 on May 7, 2019 Under the Assumed Business Name of PECS DEVELOPMENT HOME DAYCARE with the

business located at: 62 E 98th PL, CHICAGO 60628. The true and real full name(s) and residence address of the owner(s)/partner(s) is: Owner/ Partner Full Name: GEMISE JACKSON. Complete Address: 62 E 98th PL, CHICAGO, IL 60628, USA (06/06)

Notice is hereby given, pursuant to "An Act in relation to the use of an Assumed Business Name in the conduct or transaction of Business in the State," as amended, that a certification was registered by the undersigned with the County Clerk of Cook County. Registration Number: Y19001373 on May 17, 2019. Under the Assumed Business Name of GOLDBROCH FURNITURE AND DESIGN with the business located at: 1610 ASHLAND AVE, EVANSTON, IL 60201. The true and real full name(s) and residence address of the owner(s)/partner(s) is: Owner/Partner Full Name Complete Address SIMON GOLDBROCH 1610 ASHLAND AVE, EVANSTON, IL 60201, USA (06/06)

Notice is hereby given, pursuant to "An Act in relation to the use of an Assumed Business Name in the conduct or transaction of Business in the State," as amended, that a certification was registered by the undersigned with the County Clerk of Cook County. Registration Number: Y19001438 on May 24, 2019 Under the Assumed Business Name of NORTHERN DARKNESS GROOMING CO.

with the business located at: 5643 N WAYNE AVE APT 1, CHICAGO, IL 60660 The true and real full name(s) and residence address of the owner(s)/partner(s) is: Owner/ Partner Full Name Complete Address BORZOK RICARDO PEREZ PETROV 5643 N WAYNE AVE APT 1 CHICAGO, IL 60660, USA (06/13)



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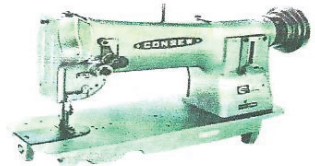
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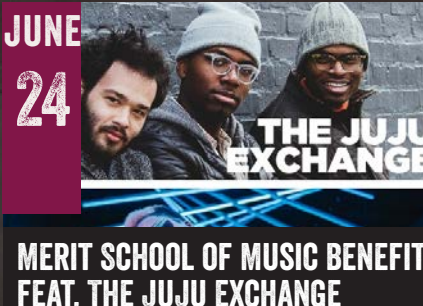
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